THE PASSION FLOWER

By

Edna Worthley Underwood

O.P. sent to R.R.L. 9/28/32

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THE PASSION FLOWER

IS VOLUME TWO OF

THE NEW WORLD TRILOGY

THE OTHERS ARE :

THE PENITENT AND THE PAGEANT-MAKER

THE PASSION FLOWER

THE PASSION FLOWER

BY

EDNA WORTHLEY UNDERWOOD

Author of "The Penitent," etc.

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TO

CALVIN THOMAS

Dedicated to the late Professor Calvin Thomas, late head of the department of Teutonic Languages and Literatures, Columbia University, New York City, to whom first this initial idea of *The New World Trilogy* — three novels — picturing the crumbling of the great civilization of the past was submitted and which he was kind enough to commend.

Once my teacher; always my friend; and to the world at large a noble example of broad and accurate scholarship.

EROS OMNIA PER TE

Inscription upon the tomb of a Roman youth in Africa

The dominant character of the thought of the New World was developed first in all its power under Nicholas.

The distinctive features are a tragic freedom of mind, destruction of faith, and a denying of everything.

HERZEN

(*Written before* 1848)

FOREWORD

I BEG leave to correct a misconception which was general upon the publication of the first volume of the New World Trilogy — THE PENITENT — namely, that the trilogy in its entirety was to show the downfall of Russian civilization. This is not the case. The subject is larger and more comprehensive. It shows the change of civilization creeping over the entire world, in which Russia is merely an incident and not an end.

THE PENITENT pictures the new ways of living in Europe following the wars of Napoleon the First. THE PASSION FLOWER carries this change across intermediate Slav and Balkan lands, and thence into Asia. It shows what came after the marching of the great gray armies of Nicholas the First.

THE PAGEANT-MAKER, the third and last of the Trilogy, will carry this dramatic story of civilization — which is both a new interpretation of history and a prophecy — to the Americas — the New World — and show the life there after the marching of the armies of Pershing. It will be a picture of American life written from a viewpoint never before suggested or attempted.

The question naturally arises, Why should the Trilogy begin with Alexander the First of Russia — THE PENITENT? The answer is: He is the first person of the old aristocracy whom a changing civilization began to touch perilously. His faults are not altogether personal faults; they are partly of the age.

Why is Russia chosen as the opening of the Trilogy? Because the civilization of Russia was young, not so deeply rooted in the past, and the changes coming over it could be more sensitively felt, then seized, and made visible. And perhaps, most important of all, because it was not genuine, but an imitation of another civilization — that of France; and because, being a copy, it was exaggerated, as copies usually are, and its outlines were bold and sharp.

The three characters — after which each volume of the Trilogy is named — THE PENITENT, THE PASSION FLOWER, THE PAGEANT-MAKER — are three types of life which reached their finest flowering in the old days, but which cannot come again, in excellence, in the commercial, the mechanical civilization of the New World which is on the wing. They are three examples of picturesque and superb wasting.

THE PENITENT, THE PASSION FLOWER, THE PAGEANT-MAKER are the swan-song of the life that reached its height in France just before the Great Revolution. Each name-character is symbolic of an age. Each age is a step leading to the unmeasured future.

They are merely actors — the three — actors, wearing their gayest smiles and their most resplendent clothes, while making a farewell bow upon the dimming stage of the past.

E. W. U.

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THE PASSION FLOWER

THE PASSION FLOWER

CHAPTER I

THE BALL

It is something worthy to hold in memory forever, the period that followed the crowning of Nicholas. It is a significant point of time, corrupt, but still magnificent, the final, dramatic, superbly dressed commingling of the old and the new. It is the last fine, outflung echoing splendor of the sunset of imperial power — soon to disappear forever — but which had been gathering strength throughout the centuries to light to-night. The traditions of Assyria, Rome, and Egypt, reached their apotheosis here, became top-heavy, threatening, unsafe. Just once in history — and that was here to-night — all the past was poised and focussed for the present's amazed, comprehensive seeing.

In short, the chosen of the world were gathered in Peter. Northward for months the star of empire and the feet of caravans had been wending their way. A Polar city had suddenly become the world's center, overthrown balance, and taken unto itself the elect of creation. Blue Books of nations could have been rewritten accurately from the sudden influx of foreign peoples into Moscow, into Petersburg. And what a range these people included! The emotionally curious children of genius were here; artists, poets, painters, to whom home does not necessarily mean the land where they were born, but the bit of blue that bends above their heads. There were sensation-loving world-wanderers; princes from dismantled thrones, and forgotten peoples marking the geographical progress eastward of the great gray armies; old provincial families, hoping for peace again, and for any kind of place at court with a new emperor; soldiers of fortune; reckless

adventurers, beggars all, of soul, who long to bask in the luxurious hours of a ruler who is young and inexperienced.

Two thousand people were to dance upon the palace floor to-night. What an impassioned, glowing picture, the interior of the Hermitage presented, an astonishing picture to paint against the cold and somber background of the Pole! Some of the long palace windows, reaching to the ceiling, had had false coverings made for them, coverings of flashing Venetian mirrors, completely framed in cut flower-buds. Some of the covered windows were panels — pictures — made entirely of flowers, and of the richest and rarest. The man who ruled three quarters of mankind had declared: "Somewhere — always — upon the face of the earth spring is blooming. Bring me for my walls to-night the perishable flowers of spring." To do this men and horses had given up their lives upon the steppes of the south. To do this ships had ploughed fresh furrows across lonely and uncharted oceans.

Nicholas, the young Emperor, was determined to make this winter of his reign so brilliant that men would be forced to forget — and that was what he longed to do himself — and few realized how bitterly. He would divert the minds of the people so that they would think no more of the sad and harrowing events that had passed. Already a life, and that a royal one, had been flung to the mob to sate its fury, just as in Cæsar's day. And now it was time to forget.

He would dazzle, therefore, not only the Russians, but the Europeans, the Asiatics. He would make them afraid of him with his power, his magnificence, his proud and defiant security. He would not only make them forget — as he longed to forget himself — but he would blind their eyes so completely that they could neither see nor judge the newness, the crudeness of the country, the constantly outcropping barbarity, the restless, the threatening instability — and the ever-present fear for the future.

The interior of the Hermitage recalled to mind one of those precious receptacles which Benvenuto Cellini rejoiced in making out of gold and pearls, gems, and moth-gray Siberian crystal. The vast banquet-room was hung with ropes made of spun and twisted glass, along which multiple reflections of flame played and

shivered, danced and twisted. The room was enveloped in a drapery of changing, sensitive crystal. In order to break the hard, the too brilliant outline, and to give escape for the senses into even greater vastnesses beyond, not only of space, but of time, mimic gardens interspersed the crystal, wherein old, impassioned tales of history and love were reproduced in miniature. Fine wires of gold described upon the circling ropes the draperies of crystal, the eloquent intricacies of Arabian art, until it was as if the sound of the great orchestras playing intermittently behind walls of roses could be heard and understood by the eye. Microscopic lines twisted out of gold and then engrafted upon crystal formed a decorative conception bespeaking grandeur of imagination combined with exhaustless patience of execution.

Fountains spouted perfumes. Fountains spouted precious French and fiery Hungarian wines. Rich-hued tropic birds dragged their heavy, shimmering plumage from rare tree to shrub, coquetted with the flowers, or observed the scene with gem-bright, inquisitive eyes. Peacocks, white and purple, outspread their starlike fans.

In the long outer corridors there was a veritable wilderness of blossoms, such petaled magnificence as only the Asiatic can appreciate. There were capriciously shaped, huge-leaved, blossomless plants that resembled forms seen in a nightmare, possessing the surprising, the vital, vivid green of equatorial lands. There were the aloe and the cactus. There were blossoming orange and apple trees — white and fragrant — and white and purple lilacs.

Fig trees had been transplanted bodily all the way from the Barbary coast. And royal palms from the African desert; feathery topped, black, fantastic. Wherever the eye turned, it looked upon sullen, savage splendor, such as only slow time, the petulance, the pride of Muscovite Czars, unbridled caprice coupled with boundless wealth, and imagination, can make. Here extravagance and autocratic will met. Beside this unrestraint of color, this lavishness, this license of line — under the insidious, compelling spell of music — the old classic ideal of Greece seemed, for the moment, cold.

And over all rested the artificial light of thousands upon thousands of candles in white and glistening sconces, turning night into a brittle, an unreal day. To illumine these vast state apartments for a single night cost a fortune such as families could live upon for a lifetime. Moving in this sumptuous setting were the fabulous figures of the old court world in gala attire — a scene, in short, that could be worthily reproduced only by a Monticelli who knew how to carve in paint and then fling it upon the canvas with a defiant richness that surpassed gems, or by the brush of some wanton old Venetian, who had loved and then lingered over a Doge's pomp.

Exactly upon the stroke of midnight, Nicholas the First, the emperor who was never known to be an instant late nor an instant early — and who was always right — made his appearance. Beside him walked the Empress, the daughter of that Queen Louise of Prussia whose beauty Napoleon had tried in vain to buy. At announcement by the Master of Ceremonies of the approach of Their Majesties, this vast, glittering assemblage swept forward in servile reverence, as the grainfield bends before the wind. It was just such eloquent, such dramatic homage as that old, upflung, ecstatic arm-salute of the Roman legions when Cæsar came. As Nicholas turned to face the room, this man of gigantic stature, towering head and shoulders above other men, he saw a world literally prostrate at his feet. Nowhere else in Christendom could a scene like this have been produced.

Then the long procession of strange and exotic peoples from the four corners of creation began to form in order to pass in front of Their Majesties. Just at that moment, Alexis Sergiewitch, dressed in pale gray satin, slender and agile, had succeeded in wiggling himself into a vantage-point where he could see. At notice of release from exile, he had rushed like a madman from his lonely country home, Mikhailovsky, to be present to-night.

"Hello — Schukowsky!" his gay voice called, pulling his old protector by the sleeve as he spoke. "Here is a place we can both see." Schukowsky noted sensitively the excited tremor in his young friend's voice.

"Consider, Alexis Sergiewitch," the older man replied some-

what gravely and reprovingly, "what a vast geography lies outspread in this assemblage," sweeping the long room with a swift, appraising glance.

"Look — look, Vassili Andrejewitch! They are going forward! Tell me who they are."

The chosen representatives of European sovereigns, envoys extraordinary, moved past with the dignity, the pride which the occasion demanded. They were in full court regalia, gemmed orders from the rulers of Europe glittering upon their breasts. Old and decrepit generals and officers, who had entered Paris with Alexander, at the head of a fêted and triumphing army, men with stern, sad faces which suffering upon battle-fields had moulded, followed, all the decorations of Russia blazing upon them, most brilliant of which were the Order of Saint Andrew upon a wide blue ribbon, the round dazzling diamond star of Alexander Nevsky and the cross of Saint Vladimir.

"Vassili Andrejewitch!"

"Where?"

"There — that strange being. The others are making way for him."

"That — is the son of Prince Sartai, called Lord of the Middle Horde. He is a blood descendant of Gengis Khan. . . ."

"Schukowsky — can you see well? He is literally clothed from head to heels in diamonds. How he shines! Whoever saw such a sight?"

"Be more quiet!" the other warned.

"I recognize that next group myself, Vassili Andrejewitch. I used to see them in Caucasia. They are warriors sent by Schamyl. Schukowsky — did you know that Schamyl is just a nickname and means '*sick man*'? You did not? His real name is a long Mohammedan one. They come from that lofty, barren, wind-blown plateau of Daghestan. . . . I crossed once. . ."

"What magnificently moulded bodies!" whispered back Schukowsky with some enthusiasm.

"The next I know, too — the one in long, swaying robe of gold tissue, the mammoth ruby on his breast. He is a Khan of Tartary. And the little doll-like, satin-skinned dark people — upturned,

gold-pointed shoulder garments and upturned gold-pointed shoes — in stiff brocades, diamond fringe swinging from their coats. . ."

"Hush! Not so loud. Eastern Asia — of course."

"Schukowsky" — in a nervous whisper any one could hear — "I could write the history of the world just from the different shoes these people wear. Look at the red morocco boots on those Circassian men. Aren't they splendid! *There! There!* A handsome race. Their waists you could span with two hands. Their chests — magnificent and deep. And they have muscles of steel. There is nothing so eloquent, Vassili Andrejewitch, as the eyes of those mountain people who dwell by the borders of Asia. When I first looked them in the face, I thought to myself that I had never seen eyes before. They have drunk the wild light of the heights."

"There — there goes a crowd of those between Europe and Asia races you are talking about now — tall, narrow-shouldered Kirghiz — from the steppe; Calmucks — yellow-faced, slant-eyed, in voluminous, radiant, bright-hued silk-and-velvet *beshmets*. Circassian noblemen of regular, fine features, whose elegant bodies are buttoned into tight, semi-tailor-made clothes of heavily gold-galooned woolen cloth; Georgians — from lonely forests and remote mountain fastnesses, wearing the quilted doublet, the *tchokka*, whose embroidered sleeves swing even with their knees; Kurd women in balloon-shaped, yellow satin trousers, pink silk swinging tunics, jeweled hoops in their noses; Armenians, in long, loose coats of bright grass-green satin which slap against their heels when they walk; Georgian women — five together. Their black satin skirts are very short. Their waists are violet silk, and broad bands of embroidery swathe their brows —"

"By looking into their faces, Vassili Andrejewitch," Alexis Sergiewitch interrupted excitedly, "I can see what they have looked out upon all their lives. You try it once and see if it isn't true! Some of those people have faced the unwatered desert, and lonely mountains — upon whose summits the snow does not melt. I can sense the vast silences that enfolded them. Contrast them — if you will — with those French courtiers over there — corrupt

— super-refined — magnificent phantoms of perished generations, evoking imperial memories."

"The Russian decorations the Caucasians are showing so proudly at present do not mean much!" observed Schukowsky with unusual acidity, seeing suddenly the wide ribbons they did not know how to wear.

"I should say not! They are betrayed just as easily as bestowed. . ."

"Do not always speak aloud everything you think — dear little brother —"

"*They* must be from Siberia — all in furs — with strings of animal-teeth about their necks! How wild, how rough their faces. They have battled with the cold. For six months at a stretch their eyes have looked upon the darkness."

"The Chinese embroideries upon those Mongolian princes — Alexis Sergiewitch — are richer than gems. Art — you see — surpasses nature as I —"

"But, Vassili Andrejewitch, I beg you not to fail to observe that Khan of the Kirghiz Cossacks! The terrors of the wild winds of the nights of the steppe are in his eyes."

"Control yourself."

"What a figure is that — *what* —"

"Alexis Sergiewitch!" The voice was stern. "That man, whose clothes, to be sure, are ridiculous, being half Chinese and half Russian, is Tschinghissoff."

"What of it?"

"He is a man Russia fears."

"Well — who is he?"

"A powerful prince from the steppe of Asia — by the shore of the Aral Sea."

A Kirghiz Sultana waddled after him. She was as huge, as round as a barrel, and she was covered with a white, floating veil. Three tall Mingrelian princes came after her; dignified, proud, with a certain air of cold aloofness. Then more ambassadors from remote Asia, two by two, took their places.

Alexis Sergiewitch began to sway with laughter. Schukowsky was worried.

"I have never seen anything to equal that — that old woman — Schukowsky. She has a short, striped, woolen — petticoat. Her feet are like paddles — and a *shako* on her head as I live —"

"Be still! That is a dethroned Queen of Georgia. She is in exile here."

"I haven't found the embassies from Persia nor Turkey. Have you? They ought to surpass the rest. Where are —"

"Hush! Not a word!"

"What?"

"He is furious!"

"Who?"

"The Emperor."

Alexis Sergiewitch had not even thought of that august personage. He was happy. He turned now to look at him for an instant, critically. It was a face that not even a scene such as this could either move or inspire. And he was young, too. The eyes were the eyes of a wild beast, not because they were cruel, but because there was nothing human in them. Something within Alexis Sergiewitch, from which his fount of joy upsprung and sparkled, seemed to droop then, and to crumple. The voice of Schukowsky irritated him.

"They defied him. They sent no ambassadors to his coronation. On that very day — in fact — Persia violated the boundary line of Russia."

Alexis Sergiewitch, interested, again turned to reply.

"I am going." Bending close to his ear so no one could hear, Schukowsky concluded: "You do not know how hard it was for me to get you set free. I could never do it again! If you love me — dear little brother — be wise to-night — and in the future. Be wise — I beg you!"

As he ploughed his way through the moving masses, he thought, with self-reproach, that he himself had been anything but wise in helping Alexis Sergiewitch to be in Peter on a night like this. How much safer for him was the lonely, snow-encircled home of Mikhailovsky.

Alexis Sergiewitch hardly noticed when Schukowsky went, so enraptured was he with the changing scene. And the kind,

paternal words of caution vanished with the sound of the kind voice that had uttered them.

How he loved the rich, the luxurious picture of court balls! Nicholas the First, overlooking from his lofty throned position the long room, and the scene, solemn and voluptuous and ponderously gay, where, for the moment — deceitfully enough — the passing of time was interrupted, tried to believe that the proud past, when imperialism was unshaken, had come back. Its rich if not genuine light was gilding, superficially, at least, the surface of the present. He did not love the scene before him for its beauty as Pushkin, the artist, loved it. Nor did he feel pride in it. Warmth of any kind was foreign to him. Deep within him there was a dull, sullen resentment for what they had done — these people — to the brother he had adored, and for the way they had played havoc with the happiness of his family. Then he felt a disdainful contempt for the weaknesses of men. He would set an example against such weaknesses, an example of stern, self-repressive devotion to duty and unswerving right. He set about formulating plans for the future.

The trumpets of one of the hidden orchestras began to leap and sing. A group of startled birds above his head shattered the air with their shrilling sweetness, and for one fine, almost emotional moment his cold brain was swayed by the old wild vision of the Romanoffs; to conquer Greece, to subdue Turkey — to be crowned in Byzantium as Emperor of the East — with one foot upon the map of Europe, the other upon Asia. And then — *India!*

And they — the people who were watching him — were hoping pitifully in their humbler hearts that that young giant up there — whom no one really knew — would at last bring back peace to the Continent, the Continent which the ambitions of that superman, Napoleon, and unestimated dreams flaming like bonfires in the brains of common men, had disrupted.

Alexis Sergiewitch began to move about happily for the pleasure of his senses. How those Finnish women, with hair like faded corn silk and eyes the sad and wistful blue of chalcedony, contrasted with the supple, dark beauty of young Cossacks from the

Province of Orenburg! How rich those French gowns of gauze — like icing upon a cake. He shrugged his aristocratic shoulders contemptuously at a number of conceited but evidently rich shop-keeping and factory men, with their wives. He had never seen such people in the palace before except on public reception days when all could come. Three fat-bellied merchants from Great Novgorod, who wore hoops of gold in their ears, in his opinion should have been shown the door. Then he shook with forgetful laughter at a group of old Russian women from remote provinces, in ostentatious, heavy finery, and the ancient Indian muslins of their grandmothers.

Six young girls, forced hothouse growths like the flowers about him, who never went out of doors in the winter nor smelled fresh air, caught his butterfly attention. They looked good enough to eat. He could not make up his mind whether milk-fed chickens or shining, sugar-coated bonbons were the best simile for them. There were Wallachian women, too, and Moldavian women. Fat, too white, moon-faced matrons from the Baltic Provinces; grumbling Finlanders; Hungarian men, dark and wiry, in short braided coats; eloquent, sentimental Poles, such as Prince Adam Czartoryski; conceited, spindle-legged fops, young officers of the Guards; glittering Hussars, who had just taken off their blue and gold embroidered dolmans; Ulans in red, their epaulets of gold and silver; a sprinkling of licentious old nobles whose word on isolated estates had the force of a Czar's. Women of the old *noblesse* showing the blending of the Russian and the Asiatic. In short, a world of uniforms, of officers, of orders.

Russian women, those of noble blood from Moscow and Peter, were gorgeous to-night. They were wearing — by order of Nicholas — the national costume. The women had on the *sarafan*, the long sleeveless robe of velvet covered with gold and silk embroidery and edged with precious furs. On their heads was the *koshkoshnik*, the crescent-shaped diadem of gems with the dramatic upturned points in the back. From it floated a long white veil. These floating veils of white, in the too sumptuous room, presented the relief to the eye of fountains of white and crystal water in a park of flowers.

An orchestra began a dance melody, the vulgar waltz, which in these days of political unrest and debasing standards, had supplanted the minuet, which is the dance of kings. Alexis Sergiewitch seized a young girl by the waist. She had the dream-veiled eyes of youth. He savored discriminatingly her innocence. As soon as the waltz was over, he left her abruptly and began again his pleasurable peregrination.

"By the body of Holy Isaac — Is that you, Delvig?" Baron Delvig, the poet, did not seem to hear. Alexis Sergiewitch hastened toward him.

"I say — Delvig!"

"I did not know you were here, Alexis Sergiewitch."

"I never felt so much here in my life! Let us take a turn together."

"Ah — Countess Woronzow!" They bowed to the knees.

"It is Princess Woronzow."

"I am pardonable, Princess," Alexis Sergiewitch hastened to explain — "years in exile . . ."

She had no personal interest in him nor his companion. She chattered like a magpie: "Delightful winter! Opera never so splendid — nor the ballet. You will see! Last fall, Prince —" a crash of the orchestra concealed the name, "gave one boar hunt that cost five hundred thousand rubles. Many a ball now costs a million — our princely houses have been giving fêtes for His Majesty that would impoverish any land not kept up by the unpaid labor of serfs."

"Where is *Monsieur le Prince?*"

"In Caucasia. — I gave one myself. It was fairyland." She was eager to go. Her white velvet *sarafan*, edged with perishing black sable, was covered with the purple lilies of France picked out in crystal. Her towering headdress was of sapphires and pearls. Rivers of pearls of purest luster held together the rows of bracelets that clasped her arms from wrist to shoulder. Pearls encrusted her satin shoes, and the high heels that upheld the prettiest feet in Russia were studded with diamonds.

"Marie Antonova Narischkin!" gasped Alexis Sergiewitch. "And not a day older! She is radiating the love of that noble

heart that squandered its joy upon her," saddened a moment by the memory of Alexander. "She is displaying the princely gems he gave her!"

"Do you know, Alexis Sergiewitch, they say she pays her lovers now?"

"*Ah — ha!* There's a chance for me! Sometimes I think it is the only thing for which I have any talent. — Princess Galitzin, too, Delvig, by all the gods! Attractive blonde. I suppose you have heard, haven't you, about my biting her shoulder — in Moscow — one night at the royal opera?"

Delvig shook his head.

"You haven't? They are lovely shoulders, Delvig! I am just like this scene to-night. Nothing in moderation here — and nothing in moderation in me. *C'est une chose déséquilibrée — comme moi.*"

Delvig remembered suddenly certain mad pranks of his companion in Czarskoje Selo, when they were studying at the Lyceum together. It occurred to him to make an excuse hastily and join two passing companions.

Alexis Sergiewitch paid no attention to his departure. He had just caught sight of young, fashionable Prince Odojewsky, who looked as blond to-night as a gold-dusted bee. He groped his way toward him. Another waltz was beginning. They moved back with the crowd to watch the dancers. The Empress — young and fond of dancing — whirled by with the French Ambassador, most popular of foreigners in Peter, La Ferronhays; her elder sister followed with the Austrian Ambassador, Count Fiquelmont, Nicholas and a group of chosen friends were still chatting together. Count Alexis Orlow, Count Benkendorf, General Paskiewich, who was thinking proudly that his great gray armies — silent, unseen, terrible — formed the background of the royal ball; Pozzo di Borgo, the Corsican, just made a Count by the Emperor; Count Bobrinsky, Prince Viazemsky, Count Cyril Razumowsky, whose eyes were sad and dull like worn black satin, and who had come on from Vienna for the occasion; and Prince Galitzin. Little old near-sighted Nesselrode — upon whom Nicholas had just bestowed a fortune — was dancing, and so was

the Countess of the gossiping pen. Countess Orlow, ascetic, religious-faced, and anything but happy in this atmosphere of the world she disdained, and from which she held aloof, was dancing like a wooden-legged doll with the fat-bellied Ambassador from the Netherlands, Baron Heeckeren-Dantes.

"Name the foreigners, Odojewsky. You forget I'm from the country! Who is that man over there, old, broken-down, yet so imposing? The one with long, somber face, long nose, round gimlet eyes —"

"That is the Iron Duke — Wellington. Beside him is the other envoy extraordinary sent by England — Stratford Canning, a cousin of the Foreign Minister, and one of the few with whom he cannot pick a quarrel. He came on from Constantinople where he is Ambassador."

"And that youth — so pale — so distinguished? He might be the Prince of all the Bourbons."

"That's young Metternich — Victor! And he has had the pleasures of the Bourbons, too."

"He has inherited evidently," observed Pushkin, "the powers of fascination of his father."

Odojewsky whispered hastily a few words in his companion's ear.

"That is why he is dying now — of consumption! But before he dies he will be Ambassador to France — a boy in the early twenties."

The swaying waltzers seemed to lift with the wavelike swell of the music, and present a long, shining furrow bounded at the other end by the red velvet flowers of an hibiscus tree, and the eye focussed upon the dark, animated face of Capo d'Istria, the Greek, eagle-eyed and hawk-nosed, long in the service of Russia. He was entertaining the foreign guests by pointing out for them distinguished Russians. Just now he was remarking, in faultless French: "Yes, that slender figure in gray satin over there is our Pushkin! Beside him Griboiedov, the playwright — Two men of genius."

The eyes of young Metternich brightened appreciatively.

"How dissimilar they are — your Pushkin, and his playwright

companion. But what an ideal background for the making of a poet has your Pushkin! The joy, the sensuousness of the Negro, coupled with the childish soul of the Slav."

The tall, arrogant Wellington lifted his monocle. He observed him with disdain. For him there could be no poets out of England. Stratford Canning waited carefully until Capo d'Istria was out of hearing when he remarked *sotto voce* to Wellington, whom he hated cordially:

"It is merely an attempted imitation — this ball — of the fêtes of the Grand Monarque — with certain barbaric additions — questionable in taste — and a display of Eastern opulence."

Wellington disappointed him by agreeing with him, and without any reservations.

"Those old men, Odojewsky — to the right of Wellington and that blazing hibiscus — Frenchmen assuredly of the *ancien régime* — corrupt — exquisite — They belong to the witty France over which Voltaire presided. They are planning how they will describe this to their Foreign Minister of the bitter tongue, but who knows art values."

There was a thrill in his voice. Alexis Sergiewitch respected the distinguished taste of France. His manner showed it.

"Right! I overheard them talking just before I met you. For them — of course you know — there's nothing out of Paris. Conceited knaves! They agreed that this ball would show a competent observer what Russia lacks — a warmer, a more equable climate, and that ordinating mind that has belonged alone to the Latin. They insisted it reminded them of the splendid dream of a blind man who had lived always in the dark."

"We know, assuredly," Pushkin replied, "that the best-trained observers in Europe are on duty to-night. We know how subtle they are — how prodigiously penetrating. They are wondering what is coming. They are trying to spy out the forces that are active beneath the surface. They are determined and ready to play any game — no matter how dangerous — under the gay mask of pleasure, of carelessness."

Griboiedov was silent, but his eyes looked out hungrily from his lean face.

"But" — with sharp change of tone — "they are glad enough to accept our lavish hospitality. Then they show off their shabby wit by dissecting what they call the primitive instincts of our polite world. The asses!" he added savagely.

Griboiedov measured the wild tongue of Pushkin, and feared for him because he loved him.

Odojewsky was not listening. He did not care. "Princess Bagration's escort is bowing. I think I will join her," disappearing deftly.

The waltz was over. The vast, shining floor was comparatively empty, and the candlelight slipped across it. At the end of the room a figure, made diminutive by distance, stepped into view, silhouetted whitely: a woman, in a French court gown of cream-colored gauze, whose head was round, small, shining, like black marble. She wore no jewels, no flowers. The figure caught Pushkin's artist's eye because of its symmetry, and a kind of nerveless repose. Then memory began to spin the fragile filaments that weave the past into the present. There was something familiar about her. Where had he seen her? The present dimmed. A night of joy of long ago swung back — Bakshi Serai — the mysterious inmate of a Tartar palace!

"Who is that?" in a strained voice; "that woman — there — in white?" pulling a passing page by the arm, as Griboiedov was leaving.

"The spy of Metternich!" — barely turning his head and hastening on.

The dancing began. The floor filled. He started toward her. Just as he turned, he collided with Baratinsky, who seized him by the shoulder. He was bubbling with news.

"What do you suppose I just overheard?"

Pushkin was indifferent. He was eager to get away.

Baratinsky put his lips to his ear. "Just as soon as that married nun over there — Countess Orlow — leaves, the Count is going to take that handsome spy of Metternich's, they call Châli, home — alone — The sleigh is to wait at the little side door on —— street — not by the public entrance. She — and —"

A waltzing couple bumped into them, separated them forcibly,

and Alexis Sergiewitch began again his valiant struggle to reach her.

He felt himself uplifted upon the wave of a masterful emotion. He was swept on without his will. The rich, the sumptuous pageant about him increased this sensation. His eyes were delighted. His senses were caressed. The destructive rhythm of music, and some of its madness, went into his blood.

His hasty progress toward the little figure in cream gauze gave him the sensation of trying to swim through some difficult, rare, and uncatalogued element. Furiously he pressed on. There was nothing he would not do to reach her! Now the orchestra sobbed in his ears no longer. He heard instead the nightingales of Bakshi Serai singing under the moon.

Painted fans made of ivory, made of pearl with its fishlike gleam — keeping a memory of the muted sea — touched his cheeks. Laces, rich and rare, clung detainingly to his shoulders, his legs. The crowd surely was increasing! The deep thickness of velvet, of fur, sucked down the light in whirlpools and made dusky splashes across the brightness through which he was trying to swim. The piled-up sweetness, the overlapping delicacy of gauzes upon whirling figures, made him dizzy and lose direction. The rich hair, the smooth skin of youth touched him and he enjoyed it. He saw a lovely back — bare to the waist; a transient profile that enthralled his eyes; the shining line of a lifted shoulder; the grace, the suppleness of bodies whose voluptuous motions had been love-taught. He sensed enveloping him the lyric sweetness of satin; rustling brocades; uniforms covered with gold; bird-wing flutter of muslins. His eyes registered gratefully various pleasant sensations: the cool, color-charm of those green gardens of spring Leloir was painting; or yellow satin like a bird's voice; and youth — everywhere — its eternal allurement.

Laces, encrusted thickly like frost, caressed him, obstructed him. All about him was coquetry of attitude, eloquence, desire, enthusiasm, or languor of gestures, of eyes; the sensuous beauty of bare arms; flicker of fans, like love-heavy, sullen night-moths. Upon these fans, refreshing heated faces, or covering them for stolen or amorous whispers, he saw depicted old scenes of licen-

tious youth and love. And sometimes their thinly veiled *dénoûement*. Pouring over all, making him lose balance dizzily, and sense of time, was the light of candles — countless candles — like the spouting jets of white and magic fountains. And all about him in the heavy air there was that intoxicating, indescribable perfume, which is woman in her hours of pleasure.

He had succeeded in crossing the room. But the figure in cream gauze was nowhere to be seen. He had missed the way. He found himself near a door leading into one of the long corridors, which, after he had crossed it, opened into still another long parallel corridor, which connected this time with the exits. He was turning nervously to inquire direction of a page in order to retrace his steps, when a hurrying group bumped roughly into him. An excited voice replied: "The sleigh of *Madame la Comtesse* is ready."

He turned. He met the ageing, somewhat strained fanatical eyes of Countess Orlow. Evidently she was relieved to turn her back upon the ball.

In an instant his decision was made. Orlow would not take the spy of Metternich home in a sleigh that bore the Orlow arms. It would be a hired one and fur-hooded. It would probably be waiting there now. He would run the risk. The old love of daring, reckless adventure, to which years of exile had put a stop, grew strong within him. The address would have been given the coachman. He would risk it! Nicholas might detain Orlow, and he would take Orlow's place. The joke on Orlow! For the first time in years he was feeling the happiness of the old days.

He ran to the cloak-room where an army of flunkeys watched over and kept in order wraps and boots of precious fur. When he was ready, nothing of him was visible, except his eyes.

He stepped outside gayly. The wind, however, struck him reproachfully. The cruel Arctic stars looked cold and high.

He had not waited long when he heard the quick crunch, crunch of little feet upon hard snow. The coachman leaped out. He opened the door. A figure swaddled in furs like himself and unrecognizable got in. A whip cracked. They were away.

They slipped swiftly between rows of astonishing and ancient state coaches set for the occasion upon runners. They were rich

and gay with plate glass, gold, Saxon porcelain heaters, and card tables, Dresden panels, or hoods of fur. For blocks the snow was black with people, trying to catch glimpse of the royal revel. Bonfires were burning along all the streets. Over them the servants, coachmen, crowd, warmed frozen fingers and toes. Torch-bearers lined the avenues leading to the palace. Their shaking torches painted rippling ribbons upon the snow. The vast, many-windowed royal residence spread abroad the radiance of a sun.

They sat huddled up close together, buried in their furs. He was chuckling and enjoying the thought of Orlow waiting in the wind of night, alone, in the cold. Just before they reached the dwelling which was Châli's, Pushkin threw back his hood, as they were passing a bonfire.

"Look at me! Tell me if you will forgive me again!"

Involuntarily she clutched her neck, hearing a strange voice and forgetting for the moment she wore no jewels.

"I am not a thief any more than I was then," merrily observing the gesture.

Reassured, she turned to look at him. She saw beside her, not the ageing Orlow, but a man slender, and young.

"Do you not remember?" he inquired wistfully. Thought, active and searching, clouded her eyes. "I have learned your name. It is Châli. You can never hide from me again! You are the spy of Metternich — just as I guessed — then —"

"Ah — Bakshi Serai — And the garden —"

"And the night I climbed into your window!"

"A — h!"

"And you forgot me?" more wistfully.

"What is your name?"

"Pushkin."

"The poet — just released from exile?"

He nodded.

"Are you trying to get exiled again — this time for life?"

"What do you mean?"

"For playing this prank on Orlow." They were driving up to the door.

"How can you have the heart to scold me? You know how long I have waited for to-night. I could not help it. It was you — your allurement — your beauty. They overpowered me. I could not resist. I found out — by accident — that you were going to meet Orlow. I swore I would have you to myself once — all alone — no matter what the cost."

"Foolish boy!" There was anger in her voice. "Do you not know that no man stands so close to Nicholas as Orlow? He loves him in something the same way he loved his brother, Alexander — and he trusts him too."

The cumbersome coachman was beginning to descend. Pushkin's hands sought hers, eagerly, under the furs.

"Please let me come in! Think how long I have dreamed of seeing you. And now — to-night —"

"Do you want to go to Siberia? Drive back as speedily as you can. Show yourself at the ball. As for me I can feign sudden illness —"

"Do not send me away!"

Emotion and disappointment rang in his voice. This man who was cold and critical when he wrote, and who knew how to link patiently together the logic of thought, bent weakly at the touch of life.

"Are you mad?"

"Tell me, then, when I may come to see you!"

"Drive back! Save yourself — while yet there is time — if you can. . ."

She was on the way to the door. She did not pause. She did not look back. The train of white gauze, forgotten in her haste and fear, escaped from under the long black fur of her dolman and fluttered out wildly behind her.

CHAPTER II

THE INTERVIEW

ALEXIS SERGIEWITCH awoke with the consciousness of something not too pleasant impending. Up through the protecting covering of brief, but heavy sleep, following a night of dissipation, at length it poked itself, the memory of the summons to be at the Winter Palace at two o'clock, and with it Schukowsky's impressive warning not to be an instant late. It was a great bore, this being pulled here and there by somebody else's will and being forced to do things he had no interest in doing. Then the consciousness of freedom, which was something he had not enjoyed for so long, came to console him a little with its unwonted liberties. He jumped out of bed. He dressed hurriedly.

When he had breakfasted and stepped out into the keen winter day and the blue edge of the light tingled against his lids, a slender figure, luxuriously protected from head to heels in beaver, he was happy and almost gay.

More than an hour intervened between him and the hated interview with the Emperor. That was not a length of time to disdain. Outdoor Petersburg spread about him somewhat sadly, morosely, but no such impression penetrated him. On the contrary, he began to observe anew and freshly — after all the years — the city of his former delights. He swung briskly into the broad Nevsky Prospect, that truly royal thoroughfare, leading in a straight line from the Smolna Cloister to the Winter Palace. He looked happily about at remembered buildings, chuckling now and then as some amorous escapade occurred to him or some merry trick he had played.

He glimpsed the Palace of the Chevalier Guards. He promised himself pleasant hours there again with his former companions — wine, gambling, excitement, danger — the things that kept life from standing still.

Not far from the old Monastery of Smolna — but across the way from the Chevalier Guards — his eyes picked up the green

roof of the palace Potemkin had built for a surprise for Catherine. It was a rare green turquoise twinkling against the sky. The ridiculously pedantic Grand Duke Michael lived there now. His mobile face expressed disdain. In the cold thin air above him gold sparkled on the top of the Admiralty, and the huge Cathedral of Saint Isaac's. Far away—a vast, unwieldy structure — stood the palace built by Paul the First, the father of the present Emperor. It was a dull pinkish red, the color of the gloves the Emperor's mistress, Princess Gagarin, wore the day it was finished. He laughed aloud at the folly of kings, and the lasting memories they erect to it. But the folly of kings is for praise, while the folly of men is for punishment.

There arose in him, however, instantly, at the mental contact, a desire for pleasure of which he had long been deprived. It was so insistent, so impelling, that it resembled a drunkard's thirst. It was something he could not control. He was starved emotionally. He felt zest to possess, to enjoy. He was hungry for life. Furious appetites which had been held in leash for two years in remote Mikhailovsky which the fields enfolded, awoke, became restive — like spring in the jungle — in the land of his ancestors, when black love came.

He wanted to feel the old happinesses, the fierce pleasures that for periods obliterate living and consciousness. He longed, too, for conquest of fame, social power, but most of all — love. They would soon be his. He was free now. He was sure he was going to force his wishes to reality. He would be poet, leader of society. Everything he wished would be his. He walked along more briskly, the bright, brittle snow crunching beneath his feet. As usual when he was happy and out of doors he improvised jingles and kept time to their rhythm.

The palace loomed coldly regular in the distance. It blocked his free view toward those magnificent and lonely plains that meet the Finnish Sea — where the polar waters threaten. Within that building was Nicholas, the unknown, but the one who controlled his destiny. Impulsively he jingled on:

Brief the time he has reigned, but what work at outset,
In exile one hundred . . . five on the gibbet.

He felt cold. He beat his hands together. He thought of a dozen places he wished to go. A dozen possible pleasures beckoned. He had an impulse to turn, to run away. Something remembered in the tone of Schukowsky's voice alone restrained him. He could not put up with constraint! It changed the outer garb of everything. It made the world look different. Something like this usually happened — he told himself — when he reached a point of happiness he longed to hold. The dull demand of duty broke harshly upon his luxurious mood.

To his sensitive impressionableness Petersburg began to look different. It took on another appearance. Its sky was depressing, cold. The vast palaces he was passing so rapidly now on his way to Nicholas were merely a debauch of the uncritical nomad for immensity. How brief the years behind them! How ugly to look at!

It was a too hastily built sham — this city by the Pole — harsh, stern, a spot of borrowed splendor, he thought angrily, because he was forcing himself to go on. The nearer he approached, the more his gay illusions drooped, grew dim. If it were not for Schukowsky, whose plea to Nicholas had set him free, he would run away. He could not face unpleasant things. To do so made him suffer. Then the memory of Alexander saddened him — that exquisite figure who had understood and pardoned all his faults.

Vast and feverish, indeed, was the city that spread before him in two long lines, where the nomad of the steppe — by nature a wanderer just like himself — too hastily stopped, perforce, his wanderings, and became first dissatisfied, then dangerous politically — not for any intentional fault on his part, but because he was born a wanderer and not a city-builder. In Peter — sweeping with critical eyes the imposing Prospect with its costly edifices — more unfriendly, conflicting impulses meet in material surroundings than elsewhere. Under the cold sky of my city dwells — with unbridled voluptuousness — revolt, a longing for poise, for political stability, and leadership. No other city has set such slight store by life. Superb contradictions! Life is cheap. It is life they hold least in reverence, recalling his pitiful young friends — the Decembrists — and their death.

The people who made Peter revolted too quickly, too impulsively against the past. From that came this — this stern, architectural regularity so unlike expansive, emotional Moscow. It is a forced gesture to pen in securely the present they fear to lose. Not a gradual, a reasoned growth — strengthened by time — but a gigantic, dull caprice made permanent in stone, upon the restless, unready hearts of whose nomadic founders there had fallen too suddenly the disturbing, the weakening, tenderness of civilization.

"The time is up! I am forced to go in." He walked up the wide-spaced outer steps with a nimble leg motion that did not indicate his unwillingness. He was on time. An orderly took in his name. He came back with word that the Emperor was engaged. He would send for him.

The waiting-room was cold. It was draughty from constant opening of the door. It was filled with a collection of human odds and ends. Everything beautiful and luxurious had been removed. Now it was just a bare room with rows of backless benches along the wall.

He waited and waited. He was cold. He was impatient. He was growing hungry and rebellious. He decided again to run away. He put on his coat and cap. He rushed to the door. A puff of wind, bitter from the drooping afternoon, so pinched him that he went back limply and sat down.

Then he looked out the window behind him and planned by what streets it would be easiest to escape. He arose again to put the new plan into action. Down to this corner — then the first street to . . .

A voice called his name. The door at the end of the room opened. An orderly approached. He found himself walking toward the unknown. It was not his own will that was propelling him now. When he entered the long, narrow room where he had seen Alexander, he was conscious of a sudden chill. The expensive paintings which used to line the walls were gone. So was the brown leather couch. Nothing was left but the desk, with the even piles of paper upon it, and a few necessary chairs. It impressed Alexis Sergiewitch as the most barren, empty space he ever entered. It empha-

sized the new ruler's insistence upon simplicity. It was one of the expressions of his stern, dry nature.

When he lifted his eyes from the prescribed reverence to royalty, he confronted a man young in years, like himself, but who towered above him, and surpassed him physically. The faultless figure of Nicholas the First — tall, supple, symmetrical — was clothed in tight white broadcloth trousers, dark blue coat belted tightly with a sword belt. His shoulders were broad and his waist was slender. He was laced into a corset until he had the rigidity of stone. His clothes fitted him so perfectly it seemed a miracle that they could be put off and on.

His features were regular—almost faultless too; his hair light brown, and his eyes a transparent, light green-blue. But the face was so cold, so passionless, so like the face of the dead, its fineness of line did not count.

He motioned Alexis Sergiewitch to a seat. He occupied the rosewood chair of Alexander on the other side of the desk. Here he sat erect. He did not lean back nor lounge. Rest was something he did not believe in, either for himself or other people. He looked across at Alexis Sergiewitch a few moments, with his clear, crystal eyes whose gaze was as unwavering as that of a lidless serpent.

Alexis Sergiewitch heard a voice speaking, but so evenly, so unemotionally, it startled him. It was as if the silence were speaking. He caught at first the words that rippled by with difficulty. There was not the slightest change either in tempo or tone. He could not believe that words could be uttered so limpidly.

"My beloved, my esteemed friend — and councillor — Prince Michael Woronzow —" He paused. He snuffed as if he smelled something. "You have no cigars — I trust?"

"No, Your Majesty."

"I cannot endure tobacco. Smoking is permitted only in the street. — Prince Woronzow assures me you have no interest — in socialism. He talked of you. He informed me you were not included in the band of young — persons — whom duty demanded that I punish. I sent them to death." Because Nicholas had no nerves and could face death himself, he did not hesitate to

condemn others to it. Besides, an individual did not count if he got in the way of the law. Law was sacred; man inconsequential. Pushkin shuddered at thought of the death, of the suffering, that depended upon this man's conception of right.

"I judged them conscientiously — and humbly. Prince Woronzow assures me it is poetry — amusement — you care for."

Again Alexis Sergiewitch received proof of the noble heart of Woronzow. The memory did not increase his self-respect. Likewise . . .

Nicholas pulled the bell. An orderly entered.

"*Kto kureet sdiesz?*" (Any one smoking here?) The fact that he spoke in Russian indicated displeasure.

"I do not know, Your Majesty."

"Search the men in the waiting-room. I smell tobacco. Twenty-five lashes for tobacco found upon any one within the palace."

"Very good, Your Majesty."

There had been no emotional change in the voice. It flowed on coolly, evenly, like a river.

"Likewise, Vassili Andrejewitch Schukowsky, of whom Her Majesty is fond — and with our permission — has given us the same assurance. Upon his pledged word for your good behavior, I permit your release."

"I am grateful to Your Majesty." But as he spoke the escapade of the night before flitted through his mind.

"I want young men. I need them," went on the voice whose tonal impersonality impressed him so. "Youth is the material with which I am going to rebuild Russia — after the ideal of Peter the Great."

"This man's political eyes magnify little things and dissimulate large ones," observed Pushkin. "His range of nature is limited. He has the petty, practical, super-systematized logic of his German ancestry. The pulses of his heart are cold and slow."

Nicholas was speaking:

"It is the past I look to. Ivan the Terrible was a dealer of strict justice. We have had enough of Europe — European thought."

Silence fell between them with the falling of the voice that had

uttered these dull, reactionary sentences, and in that silence Nicholas observed how the body of Pushkin had taken the black blood of his mother, and how two people looked out of his face at the same time — an old man who was pitiful and a young man who was daring.

Pushkin on his part was wondering how a man whose physical body possessed such distinction could be without charm. He had none of that personal magnetism which had made both men and women fall in love with his brother. Again he was scarcely conscious when that astonishing voice broke in upon the silence which it did not seem to disturb. He wondered with sudden terror if he could have missed a word. Nicholas was getting on his nerves.

"We must understand each other. Everything must rest upon right as I see it. You have committed follies enough. Do not duplicate them! There can be no lack of respect toward authority."

A slight pause followed for the purpose of framing with a certain amount of emphasis what he was to say next, because his voice stressed nothing.

"If you had been in Peter — in December — would you have joined the revolters?"

He waited happily for a denial, enjoying as he did so the putting of wrong upon other people's shoulders which was where wrong belonged.

"Undoubtedly — *Gossudar!*" was the audacious reply. "I was one of them. They were my friends. Absence alone saved me."

The eyes of Nicholas dimmed. It was as if the pupil dropped out of sight. They became peculiarly measureless. Suddenly Pushkin felt the tremendous recoil of his anger. The Emperor's face was still impassive. But on one cheek a nerve began to tremble.

This was just what Nicholas hated in thinkers — writers, scientists, poets — as a class. It was this inclination to free speech — the thought within them which he did not control. It was something that could not be disciplined, something that marked them as different from the army caste, the social caste,

who were trained to be servile and say the thing that pleased. That was why, in his opinion, they were dangerous. They must be suppressed. He made a mental note.

"But not for long — *Gossudar!* Not anything for long! I was interested only in poetry. I supposed that was what they were interested in. I am only an artist — *Gossudar!* Until the fatal night — when I was there just by accident — I did not know they were political societies.

"I'm only what you might call a pilgrim of ideas. But I do not really believe in any of them. I bend to their power as they pass — probably because I am not strong enough to resist. I like to bathe the soul of me in new sensations. That is all. Nothing important. I could not possibly be a revolutionist for more than twenty-four hours — any more than I could be anything else. I do not pitch my tent anywhere — because I haven't the time — and I couldn't decide upon a place. A wanderer's ideas change with the landscape he looks upon."

There was nothing of the hypocrite about him, evidently, the scheming politician; but the buoyant, careless voice offended. There was something in the presence of the slender figure that spoke as equal to equal that was overpowering. Young Pushkin could not help it. He did not even know it. And yet it helped spell doom. In the heart of Nicholas there had never been any liking for him, and no sympathy with his profession, which — in the opinion of him who was always right — was something not needed. The quick, keen pulse of life displeased him. Within Nicholas there was a native impulse to suppress, to destroy. He did not intend to permit independent thinking. The privilege belonged to him. He could not realize that the young man in front of him cared nothing for politics. What else was there to care for? What else had importance?

"Explicit — well-determined right is my objective. I believe in system. In no other way is safe prodecure possible." He picked up a sheet of paper from the desk. "It will be necessary for you to sign this." He read aloud in a dry, dull voice:

I promise in the future to have nothing to do with secret societies, under whatever name they may be called. I declare that I never be-

longed in the past, and never will in future, to any secret society, and that I have never at any time known of their existence.

"But — *Gossudar* — it is a lie."

"What!"

The voice was even, low. But there was something in it more cruel than the blast of an Arctic winter. Alexis Sergiewitch felt it responsively and bent to its force.

"I am the church! Unless I will there can be no lie. Sign!"

Alexis Sergiewitch recast in terms of self the expanded meaning of the alternative. It was exile — in lonely, ugly, impossible places. It was separation from the things he loved, the things his voracious, exotic temperament demanded. He had had a taste of exile already. The second exile would be Siberia — the mines — death. That was where his gay young friend, Alexander Bestushew, probably was now. The fate of the Decembrists had frightened him. He was too young to choose a like fate — especially after last night when the humming-bird wings of love had brushed him. But the alternative with freedom was to be a coward and a liar. His pride revolted.

Then youth with its elastic hope came to console him, suggesting to him the possibility of escape from Russia and genuine freedom sometime — such as other men enjoy — in some other land. Travel! That was what he longed for.

He wondered futilely why Nicholas, who spared no one, should take such pains to spare him. Was there something back of it? For the instant the thought tarried with him, the unreasonableness of it terrified him more than anything else. Could the pardon of Nicholas be more dangerous than the punishment of Alexander? But the choice could not be delayed. Life hung in the balance. That motionless, stern figure was waiting. It was exile or servility. He picked up the pen. He wrote his name. And while he did it he knew that the memory would never cease to humiliate him. It made him contemptible in his own eyes.

When he finished, when he put down the pen, he knew he had lost self-respect. He regretted that he had not run away and escaped when he had been in Caucasia and broad highways were open and free leading to Asia, to Europe. He cursed futilely the

luck that had brought him back. He saw life sliced up into parts; he knew that only a slender fragment could belong to him.

Alexis Sergiewitch had the un-Russian characteristic of not caring for social problems. But the penetration of Nicholas who sat looking at him was not sufficient to see this, and his fear of the Decembrist movement was great. The narrow mind of the ruler saw in all directions what he disliked most — political plotters. He insisted upon seeing one in Pushkin, who was merely a man of pleasure.

Political plotters had ruined his brother's happiness. They had taken his father's life. Now they were robbing him, Nicholas, of time for his home, his happy family life with his wife and children. They had placed him upon a throne where he did not wish to be. But his sense of duty, of responsibility, was great. He would not idle. He had few ideas, and he could not conceive of life lived for any other than political ambition. He had not been trained for the throne. He had been brought up in the barracks. Education, as he conceived it, meant a well-buttoned-up parade. He was ignorant. He had slight mental expansion.

Nicholas could not realize that the man in front of him was only an artist — a reckless liver, to be sure — and had no inclination to mix in affairs. Alexis Sergiewitch — paradoxically enough — resembled the nobles of the old days of whom Nicholas approved; pleasure-loving, licentious. But prejudice, envious enemies, kept him from seeing it. Like his ruler, too, he respected only the aristocrat, the man of birth.

In Nicholas there was a generous admixture of *slavische Schlauheit* — Slavic cunning — which has made Russians foremost among natural diplomatists. In Pushkin, who said wittily everything that occurred to him, there was none of this quality. This inclined Nicholas to believe that Pushkin's bold speaking — his confession of faith — was half improper audacity in the presence of the Throne and the other half a lie. That it was that truth which Nicholas professed to adore and for which he had been known to pardon offenses did not occur to him. They wanted the same fundamental thing so they could live it over again, each in his own way for happiness — the aristocratic past. It was the

reality of the old order that Nicholas wanted, its safety, its assured calm; while Pushkin longed only for its radiant, dramatically featured dream — its caress to the eye.

Pushkin bent in apparent humility to kiss his sovereign's hand outstretched in signal of dismissal.

The room was graying now. The eyes of Nicholas in his white and motionless face shone like hard, translucent gems.

"Bring to me — and Benkendorf — everything you write. We will be your censors."

He felt like laughing at the idea of Benkendorf in the rôle of art critic. It was one of the best jokes he had heard. "Nicholas," he reflected, "does not even possess a rudimentary sense of humor." As sensitive as he was, however, he was unable to estimate the depth of nature of the autocrat who dismissed him.

Outside, muffled in his beaver coat, cap, and mittens, he paused hesitatingly upon the top step of the long stairs a few seconds, a slight, inconsequential, somewhat helpless figure against the crushing mass of the Palace behind him. He observed sadly, almost without self-impulse, the depressing effect of the too early sunsets of the northern winter. Then he watched from his lofty lookout position the plaintive, the windy rising of the pale, thin moon that came to mock the night.

Count Alexis Orlow ran up the steps and passed Alexis Sergiewitch in his solitary reverie, without being seen by him. He was admitted immediately to his sovereign's presence. Nicholas was glad to see him. He loved him. In the sad Decembrist affair, in the Great Square of Saint Isaac's, each had seen the other face death with calmness. They were two brave men. They knew how to value each other.

"I came to congratulate Your Majesty upon the ball of last night! It had the desired effect upon the foreigners. It drove home to them our power, our security. They will all think twice before they try to bait the Russian bear!"

Nicholas waved him to a seat.

"No, no! I thank Your Majesty. I merely dropped in to call to Your Majesty's attention a trick that was played upon me last night. After the Countess left, I was to drive the lovely spy of

Metternich, Châli, home. The carriage was waiting. Some one jumped in and ran away with her — in my place. A too daring deed — that!"

The face of Nicholas darkened.

"She declares she thought it was an attendant sent by me. But she does not know who it was. It looks like the escapades of the boys — in the clubs — under the reign of your brother. May God grant peace unto his soul!" He crossed himself reverently.

Nicholas bent his head, murmured a prayer, and did the same.

"I permit no trifling with men of rank. Have the Third Section, which Benkendorf is establishing, put investigators to work."

"I thank Your Majesty. The Unknown — I learn — wore a beaver coat. I just passed young Pushkin on the stairs. He had on a beaver coat."

Intelligence and memory brightened slightly the dull eyes of Nicholas.

"Under me there can be no disrespect."

"Now — if Your Majesty will permit — I will go. An engagement presses." He bowed. He gave the military salute to royalty. He went out.

Photius the priest was waiting. Nicholas gave permission for him to enter. The muscular, tall, cossack-clothed figure of the rough hair and blood-shot eyes bounded in too quickly, with too much assurance. Nicholas indicated a seat. Photius paid no attention. Head erect, he walked directly toward the Emperor, disdaining the gesture and not speaking. When he was near enough he stretched out one dirty hand for Nicholas to kiss. He waited with head erect.

The astonished orderly stood by the door. Nicholas bent his head above the hand for the space of a second, but his lips did not touch it. He could not offer an affront to the Faith in the presence of a witness. He lifted his head. The sensitive nerve danced on his cheek. He gave Photius a look which Photius never forgot.

"Summon Count Benkendorf, who at this moment awaits me in the apartments of Her Majesty." He addressed the orderly.

"My dear Count," as Benkendorf came in, "be good enough to place Photius here, the priest, in the dungeon of Peter and Paul

for three months unless a longer stay is needed. See to it that he meditates upon this fact — that in Russia the head of the Church is Nicholas."

"Very good, Your Majesty!"

Nicholas had already left the room by the other door. In the first corridor he met Count Bobrinsky, his aged relative, and illegitimate son of Catherine the Great and Orlow. They kissed each other. Nicholas put an arm about the trembling, bent shoulders of the old man. They walked along together.

"I was proud of you last night, Nicky, my boy! A Romanoff of the stamp of Peter! Every one said so. I tell you, you impressed the foreigners. I am old — Nicky, my boy. I have not long to wait to see the new Russia which you will build." Here he paused, took snuff, sneezed. When he regained breath, he chattered on: "It was a scene Russia alone could paint. It was worthy of *Louis le Grand*." Then he began to gossip. "Orlow and the lovely Châli — the blonde beauty of Galitzin — that wild Negro poet, Pushkin back again — a bet he had won from Razumowsky — the wolf hounds sired by Bagration's Napoleon. He! he! he! — He! he! he!"

His senile laughter was dry and crackling like the snow outside.

What a comfort to Nicholas were the *grands seigneurs* of the old-time, men like Bobrinsky!

The heart of Nicholas swelled with tenderness. He did not change toward the members of his family and the few he loved. For them he had a devotion which is praiseworthy. The garrulous old man walked unsteadily beside him.

The laughter of children, the rich warm tones of a woman's voice reached them. Nicholas banished cares of state. He was happy — happy in that satisfying atmosphere of home which gave him the courage to conquer.

CHAPTER III

BENKENDORF AND NICHOLAS

NICHOLAS awoke with his usual exaggerated, comic sense of personal responsibility. At five he was as orderly to the eye, as systematized in thought, as if he were headed for a council session or a dinner. Lounging, resting, lying in bed, no matter how late the hour at which he had retired —and illness — were sins. They were listed in his mind among the human weaknesses that needed correcting — and by him. He lived in constant defense of that luxury which lesser men seek and which threatened to weaken and to engulf him.

At exactly five he ate three biscuits and drank one glass of tea. The Empress shared his hobbies. She lived up to them as rigidly as he.

After this breakfast, which, with the exception of some fruit and cold water, was frequently his only meal until dinner, when he permitted himself a little wine and relaxed with his family, he went to his cabinet to consider work of the day. Now the work was particularly heavy. It would have dismayed a less fearless spirit. So much to be done over. That was the worst kind of doing. So much to be planned out, and undertaken anew. Nothing, in short, as he wished.

Nicholas did not believe — like his late brother Alexander — that the hearts of men are base. The hearts of men were good. If temporarily they seemed otherwise it was because they needed guiding by him. They needed the bracing of his stronger will, his nobler character. He was serious in the faith that God had called him to set the world to rights. At the same time he was not so conceited. A different term would be necessary to express it. It was a new kind of egotism just making its appearance.

He acknowledged that he had no mental training, that he was young, inexperienced. But God trusted him because He knew he

was faithful. In recompense God had granted him unfailing judgment. He could not be wrong because his heart was the heart of a child. God dwelled in it. God spoke through him. A man might know nothing and still be always right.

When he sent men to death, to exile, to the torture chamber, when he confiscated estates and drove families into poverty, it was he who was to be pitied. It was he who suffered in living up rigorously to a conception of duty which weaker men could not even see. It was he who suffered, in order to bring God's good into the world.

He was honorable as he conceived uprightness and honor. He loved both. He was faithful to his word. Law — in his mind — although made by man, was as sacred as the Word of God. It was the way God had of expressing Himself to a world that did not understand. In short, he was a Spartan Emperor, and his nature was as roughly masculine as the nature of Alexander had been feminine.

He had — *in excelsis* — those lofty ideals of self which — paradoxically enough — are most successfully cherished by men who have no imagination, and an inelastic mind.

This morning he set about — first — destroying the letters, the documents, which had belonged to Alexander, in accordance with the promise he had given him. He made the sign of the cross over them before he began. He did a certain amount of this each morning when he was alone. It was prayer in action. This morning he finished the documents. The next morning he would begin upon the letters so that this man of mystery might always remain a mystery — like the wearer of the Iron Mask — and become one of the future's unsolvable problems.

Count Benkendorf, whom he expected, was on time. He knew he would be. An early hour was of no consequence to him. He found His Majesty erect in the rosewood desk-chair, and as fresh and crisp as a lettuce leaf.

Count Benkendorf drew his chair close to the desk with an assurance that testified to his power. He was short, fat, with soft, indistinct outlines. His shoulders melted into his arms and his waist and his legs slipped down into a base, blurred line which was

his body — a shapeless old woman's body. His voice was low and gentle. It gave no indication of the nature of steel that was behind it. He had soft, cruel, too fat, too white, small hands which he caressed voluptuously and unceasingly. His eyes were small, deep-set, too round, and lusterless gray. They were like little spotted stones. They had a curiously penetrating quality. His straight, mouse-colored hair grew in a point upon a fairly intelligent brow, which, however, was devoid of nobility. His nose was small, insignificant. He had the too short, undeveloped arms which signify brutality and ignoble ancestry, and the rough, coarse-pored skin which showed he did not come of an ancient race. Externally he had little to impress the uncritical.

He came, indeed, of a bourgeois Esthonian family that had been recently ennobled. In the presence of royalty he was servility itself. He knew the right word. But to an underling he was a cruel and terrible master. He was honest, however. He was incorruptible as regards the Russian vices of dishonest dealing, gambling, gold-getting by crooked means. He was as loyal to Nicholas as Orlow. Nicholas knew it and trusted him. Both were devoted to system. In a country where honesty and any kind of sexual morality were an exception, he was distinguished. There were no dark, no uncertain spots in the mind of Benkendorf. It was a small space perfectly lighted. It was a diminutive, unfurnished compartment of white pine — exactly two by four — whose walls were hard and clear.

"The Third Section — its organization — progressing?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"We are forced to it, Benkendorf! The too generous, the too noble heart of my brother — whom God grant forever the peace of the blessed! — permitted the reins of government to relax. The correction, therefore, must be an over-correction. I deplore the necessity. I deplore it."

"Your Majesty, the work progresses. Every person will be listed. My system of espionage will provide walls with ears and eyes. I pay for denunciations. Nothing can happen that cannot be stopped instantly. Over Russia, Siberia, Crimea — my net of informers is spread. The future can hold no dangers. I do not warn. I do not reprimand. I seize. Then I annihilate."

At the word "annihilate" joy crept into his voice. He visualized scenes of suffering in the underground chambers below the level of the Neva. Cruelty was the voluptuousness he could not resist, he who cared not at all for women. He rubbed his soft, little white hands rapidly. A deep glow like a sullen ember that could not be extinguished — because lighted from so great a depth — crept into his stone-gray eyes.

"Upon secrecy, too, I insist — Your Majesty."

His velvety voice sank to a whisper. "There must be no open court trials. There must be no published reports. Not a word must reach the world outside! Swiftness, secrecy, surety! These will accomplish our end — a noble end, Your Majesty," bowing and crossing himself.

"What need have we of open courts? What better guaranty of right can there be than the word of Your Majesty?"

Nicholas approved the speech. It corresponded to his own thoughts. It comforted a need of his nature to which never in his life did he give expression. It was fear. This fear was stamped upon his childish memory — past any power to erase — the night his father had been murdered. A night — that — of mental terror, of prolonged agony, which he recalled vividly. He would destroy, suppress, everything that could lead to another such tragic *dénoûement.* This was a constantly impelling spring of action. His plans in this direction Benkendorf had improved upon, and then put into execution. He had expressed, too, his own unuttered ideas. In guarding Russia he had at the same time guarded him.

He felt freer. He felt happier when Benkendorf was present. Best of all, he felt safer. The words of dull Benkendorf, because they accorded richly with his hidden, inner self which no one saw — and few suspected — inspired him in a way of which the eloquent, poetic Pushkin was incapable. There was something in the personality of Pushkin that had always displeased him. It was something reactionary which was rooted deeply in nature itself. Nicholas was beginning the day under good auspices.

"With you to help, Benkendorf — whom I trust, whose ability I have frequent occasion to admire — and which I will reward

accordingly — I will create a triumphant Russia — that shall be unshakable for centuries, just as Rome for centuries was unshakable." A slightly perceptible tremor quickened with the eagerness of desire the unemotional voice.

"I will do it by the dominance of self, by the dominance of passions — appetites — and of men. One must sacrifice to life — to God. There shall be no weaknesses. All shall be — not for me — but for power, for the future. I will sacrifice to right as I see it."

He felt suddenly surer of himself in the presence of this man who, if he saw few things, saw those few things well. Then — after a pause — which seemed to hold, as within a frame, the future: "To right — as I see it! And I will be the example. I will restore the grandeurs that belong to monarchy."

He left his chair. The power of the vision upbore him. He walked in the space between the desk and the window, a tall, finely formed figure, supple and graceful.

"Not only Russia, Your Majesty! The task is great." Benkendorf hoped to hold a little longer intact the former moment's inspiration for whatever purpose might serve his own ends best.

"I know! I know!" a little hastily.

Nicholas was watching outdoors the pale blue death-light of early day as it slipped uncertainly across the snow. Now it was sending out pallid but confusing beams to dim the struggling candles.

He paused in his walk. He was training himself to respond automatically to the slightest need. He ordered the servant to put out the candles. It was the time now to put out candles. Great things and little things should be done with equal diligence — and on time. They were equal, indeed, where perfection was the goal. He rang angrily the second time.

"Report to the Palace Superintendent that this morning there was a delay of exactly ten minutes in extinguishing the candles. In granting the black and yellow button for perfect service this failure must be recorded."

"Very good, Your Majesty," bowing out.

"You refer, Benkendorf, to the fact that something must oppose free thinking — France — the Continent — to save it from

destruction — a Decembrist Uprising that shall be universal?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. And I make bold to ask Your Majesty what nation save Holy Russia" (bowing and crossing himself) "is strong enough? What ruler save Your Majesty — God grant long life and happiness! — is far-seeing enough?" The flattered silence that followed lasted for seconds.

"True, Benkendorf. True!"

"I suggest, Your Majesty, a censorship so strict — and so efficient — that books, papers, periodicals of other countries cannot enter. We must avoid contact with nations whose mental plague-spots are most incurable. Make it a misdemeanor to use even the name of thinkers of whom we disapprove — these upstart users of words."

"Quite right, Benkendorf! Quite right!"

"We will stop them from reading. Then we will stop them from traveling. Who goes cannot return." If they could only keep out the reckless thinking of the ripest mentally of European nations — France!

Count Benkendorf and Nicholas were beginning to fear something which they did not know anything about, and which it was ridiculous to fear — namely, *thought*. Thought was a foolish, invisible thing whose most striking characteristic was its immunity to and its defiance of royal decree. The name Kant occurred to both of them upon the instant. They did not mention it. It was a name neither spoke. Men talked of him too much and his opinions about something he called "*Pure Reason*."

He had been a poor, shabby-coated, neglected school teacher, whose right shoulder was too high and who was ridiculous to look upon. He ate potato soup made with cabbage and slept with his clothes on beside the stove. He was used to snubs and ill treatment. But there were people who asserted that the thoughts of him and his followers were going to shake the world, drive kings from their thrones, nobles from their castles — out into the winds, out into the shelterless streets — for an humble retributive beginning over again, for the sure realization of that absolute justice which science was beginning to teach the world. There were other names, too, which did not mean anything to them — be-

cause neither one of them ever read anything — but which they had been warned to fear by persons whose judgment they respected — names such as Mazzini.

"Our greatest, our most productive field is youth, Your Majesty."

Nicholas nodded gravely as if the idea had come from him. This change of subject included hope.

"We will make over the minds of the young as we wish them — as they will be most serviceable to us."

Nicholas seated himself happily. The words had been uttered by Benkendorf, but all ideas — of course — had their inception in him.

"Orlow told you of the trick — of course — played upon himself and Châli — at the ball?"

"He did, Your Majesty. I carried out Your Majesty's instruction. Orlow went to Châli for a description of the man."

"Well?" leaning forward with something that resembled eagerness.

"She said he was fat, old, and limped a little."

"He wore a beaver coat, Benkendorf. Young Pushkin wore one, too, when I summoned him to sign the papers."

"But — Your Majesty — he is thin — Your Majesty — nimble. And that day he reached Peter. He had been in exile so long he probably never heard of the woman." Benkendorf regretted not being able to serve Orlow, whom he liked. "I should have arrested him, Your Majesty, if the woman had been a love of his."

"Writers," explained Nicholas dogmatically, "like Griboiedov and Pushkin, are hostile to our plans."

"Yes, Your Majesty. I agree, Your Majesty."

"I hoped you could prove Pushkin was the culprit!"

"And if we did, Your Majesty, it would be unwise to send him back into exile — just now. We have killed off now — Your Majesty and I — almost all the men of genius. You can count on one hand those who are left. For the rest we must proceed by circuitous, concealed paths. We cannot have it said in Europe that when a man of genius is born in Russia he is born to have his head cut off."

"I disapprove of poets, Benkendorf! I disapprove of them! They are revolutionists in disguise. They do not respect people of title sufficiently. As long as a poet is abroad — unhindered — free, Russia lives in his brain."

"Right, Your Majesty. Right! But for sake of speech of people — and praise which we must have for ourselves — we must proceed differently."

"How?"

"Pardon — and crush."

The silence became impressive. It was electric with the dilating power of two little words — *pardon* — *crush*. Nicholas was listening intently. He was interested. He wanted his own way, to be sure, and he intended to have it. At the same time he was afraid of cultivated Europe. Benkendorf was older and more experienced.

Benkendorf hated Pushkin on his own account — for making fun of him. For an instant he neglected his padded cunning.

"We'll get him, Your Majesty."

"No, no! No, no! Benkendorf — that is not my attitude. I wish to pardon always — to forgive always. When I do not, it is duty. When I cannot pardon, I suffer. I suffer — Benkendorf — as martyrs suffer! God is my witness." He crossed himself with a handsome, long-fingered hand upon which there were no rings. "I am the little father of my people. In my heart there is love."

Benkendorf could not trust the intelligence shining so richly in his eyes, so he kept on looking at his white, little hands, while he made reply. "We can kill no more. We must suppress now instead."

Nicholas, who admired cold, unshakable certitude, waited. He did not like to have twilight touch the edge of fact.

"In truth — Your Majesty — it is wisest to retrace our steps a little. Not really retrace—but pretend to—for political purposes. The death of the Decembrists in the Square of Saint Isaac's has created a — a certain amount — of emotion. That emotion is not in our favor. I think it good to proclaim now the kindness of Your Majesty's heart — which I alone appreciate — Your Majesty's forgiving nature. I see now the wisdom of what Your

Majesty did in the autumn — recalling young Alexander Bestushew from Siberia, to send to the army of the south. In the army he will die quicker. And his death will be useful to us.

"Now proclaim his pardon! Your Majesty can make use of the praise it will bring. He is of a distinguished family. His father is the famous art connoisseur, whose home is our only genuine museum. The most fastidious respect his taste. And the boy himself has such varied attainments; poet, goldsmith, sculptor, novelist, maker of precious objects out of iron — accomplished man of the world. Restore, too, his standing as an officer. In Caucasia — where Your Majesty and I know that soon war will be — he will find death."

Nicholas agreed, with the reservation that it was what he was thinking of.

"And Pushkin? He is more dangerous than either Bestushew or Griboiedov."

"Griboiedov — Your Majesty — we will attach to the staff of General Paskievich — for the war of the East. I give Your Majesty my promise that Grieboiedov shall not see Peter again — any more than Bestushew. Your Majesty will give them both places of honor because Your Majesty loves them."

"I wish — Benkendorf — I could perform always acts of love!"

Benkendorf was not in the least led astray by the words of his sovereign.

"Contrive — anyway — Benkendorf, to investigate who kidnapped Châli at the ball! You might find Pushkin did it."

"But Your Majesty could not punish him if we did find out."

"What?"

"No — Your Majesty."

"I — I could not!"

"No — Your Majesty."

"And why not?"

"He holds the heart of Russia. All its love."

The eyes of Nicholas became two pools of blue and blazing light. The nerve danced dizzily on his cheek. The soul of the autocrats of the past looked out at Benkendorf. "God knows,

Benkendorf, how I regret the need of punishing! God sees my heart."

"Pardon him, Your Majesty."

Nicholas leaned forward as if he did not hear or did not understand.

"Pretend to protect him. Then crush his heart."

"In detail?" with evident effort at self-control, but still with considerable relish.

"Make him unpopular. Let it be whispered about that court circles disapprove of him. Then — snubbing, the cold shoulder — envy for his genius — the evil hearts of men who love to wound their fellows — will do the work for us. He cannot stand disapprobation. He is too sensitive. It will drive him to wild deeds — recklessness. Your Majesty," in a whisper whose cruel joy vibrated powerfully in the bare, forbidding room which the pallid snow lighted, "he will be like an adder which stings itself to death."

"No, no, Benkendorf! God is my witness that in my heart there is only mercy! You misunderstand me." Nicholas was surprised at the inventive range in the nature of Benkendorf — surprised, and pleased.

"You understand, Benkendorf, that it is only at the sacrifice of self that I punish."

"The sentiments do honor to Your Majesty's noble heart."

"I punish for duty's sake. But I weep." He felt the mist of tears upon his voice. But they were the tears of colossal self-love, of a nature that could break, but would not bend.

After Benkendorf had gone, Nicholas saw that the light of God which shone so richly within himself — had given — temporarily — vision to Benkendorf. Personal contact with him was illuminating. It was advantageous for Russian officialdom.

CHAPTER IV

THE PETIT SOUPER

INVITATIONS to the *petits soupers* of "little old Nesselrode," as he was generally called, with an ingratiating combination of tenderness and disrespect, were the most sought-after invitations in this bizarre Polar city where Pleasure did not halt her dancing feet an hour of the day or night, and where the hours of time have been most upset. They had become, too, in a way — the *petits soupers* — a political institution, where the hope dangled enticingly before the noses of foreign diplomatists, that here they could meet Nicholas informally — learn the tempo of his moods — please him, perhaps — put forward some plan of their own which they were desirous of furthering. And if Nicholas failed, there was Nesselrode, the Chancellor — who for years had held the post of Foreign Minister — who stood next in order of power, and who knew, of course, his master's will. Something might be done with him. Nicholas — most skillful of royal tricksters — understood this.

To be present at Nesselrode's meant being in the center of what was most Russian, best of all, most approved socially, politically. The Czar, at his crowning, had given him an immense fortune, and an estate. His wife — of the gossiping pen and apparently unwise tongue — was daughter of Gurjew — fabulously rich, and once the trusted and powerful Minister of Finance. Nesselrode himself — aside from wealth and royal favor — was one of the epicures of the Continent.

Nicholas, as was his habit, turned the tables upon diplomatic expectation and used the knowledge that he was expected at Nesselrode's for his own advantage. And just at this moment it was peculiarly useful in what all Peter was laughing over and jesting about and had nicknamed "The Chase" — the constantly deceived effort of the Duke of Wellington and Stratford Canning, envoys extraordinary sent by King George of England, to see him,

talk with him, and settle the Eastern Question. He had kept them dangling after him for months. In that occupation he knew they were both safe — and useless. They thought happily each night when they went to bed that the meeting would be the next morning. Then they would pompously demand that this inexperienced, boyish ruler of a barbarous nation put himself — and his interests — in English hands.

But just before they started for the Palace a messenger always came to beg the delay of a day. His Majesty had been taken unexpectedly ill — or a deputation had just arrived which demanded immediate consideration. One of the children had fallen prey to some peculiarly infectious disease — either *petite vérole*, or that perilous Russian influenza. Nicholas loved them so, and so long had looked forward to free, untrammeled conversation with the representatives of that English sovereign — who stood for right — just as he, Nicholas, stood for it — that he begged humbly the grace of another delay. To see them, to be free and happy in mind at the same time, was the sole pleasure he was planning. Then Nicholas fell ill — when he could find no more excuses; or Nicholas left the city hurriedly, leaving for them messages of love, gifts of fruit, and flowers.

But for his trusted aids he left the sharp command to wear them out, to keep them going night and day, to give them as little sleep as possible. He commanded that they sample Russia's rarest wines, watch its gamblers, *ballerinas*, know its loveliest women. Trickery, the shallow, self-protective wisdom of ignoble minds, was his *in excelsis*. It was his strongest weapon.

In the way, peculiar alone to Peter, of breaking up news and having the particles fall exactly where desired, every one knew this and was watching it with merriment except the two fatefully concerned.

Night after night — at royal command — princely Petersburg kept open house. The lights from the long palace windows — where they drank, gambled, danced, and made love — sent resplendent ripples across the snow and made another day, if an unreal one. Nicholas tentatively promised to be present at all the different palaces at the same time, so Canning and the Iron Duke

put in their nights in chasing him from palace to palace. He explained — with tears in his eyes — that he longed to renew with his people the friendly relations of Peter the Great.

"I want my people to love me, because I love them, and approach me freely," declared that royal mountebank, who was to make a land the most desolate in Christendom. Such sentiments Canning and the Iron Duke heard daily. So they kept up the chase.

At an oblong table in that famous dining-room — where sometimes the fate of Europe was decided — which was reserved for his epicurean skill, whose walls were the pale, lacquered gold of old Pekin, little old Nesselrode sat, blinking his friendly, near-sighted blue eyes at his guests, who were men. The women were to come later — with other guests, for the dancing. Then the state apartments would be opened.

He explained, as they took their seats, that the empty chair was for His Majesty — crossing himself as he mentioned the name — who expected to be here. He had sent word that he would be here. Since he had not come — and his Royal Master was never known to be late — something important had occurred. He would come — later! This put his English guests in good-humor for the dinner. They would sound him, Nesselrode, while they ate. Then they would have their bearings — so to speak — for Nicholas who was on the way. They looked at each other joyously. At last!

Old Nesselrode explained in his soft, uninsistent voice — a little hesitatingly — with just a shade of timid depreciation his domineering English visitors observed, that it was merely a friendly little supper — *tout en famille* — in homely Russian style, in order to get better acquainted. He hoped that they would not be disappointed.

First — since he had the honor of being *chef* to-night for the flower of English wisdom — he would give them a fruit from the tropics. Then truffles in meat jelly with a sauce — his own humble invention — made of Montijo sherry. A *salmis de gelinotte*, a *chaud-froid* of partridge, spiced tongues of *élan vinaigrette*, the paws of bears grilled upon live pine coals and washed down

with a *petit vin* of Crimea, served with potatoes *à la Nesselrode.*

And for dessert — *Ah ha!* — They must wait — waving an awkward gesture and giving them his disarming, childish smile. The champagne, he begged leave to add, was made for him. It was the sole vintage of a wine-grower of the *Midi*, because grapes grown upon land that had been cultivated for generations made the finest champagne. Another timid, awkward gesture and the serving began.

Young Metternich recalled his father's command to picture vividly in letters not only general conditions, but people. He understood that this was his try-out for ambassadorship to France for which his father had made ready by sending Esterhazy on to London.

Young Metternich had the precociously developed mind, the self-forgetful happiness, which the fever of consumption gives. He was elated to-night. He had discovered by his own initiative, and then described, the trick being put up upon the two Englishmen whom his father hated. His eyes smiled whenever they turned toward the empty chair.

He looked about nimbly. There was Schukowsky — growing old — of the ugly yellow face, black, slanting Mongol eyes, which just now were turned toward Pushkin, in whose manner there was something reckless, unrestrainable, which Schukowsky seemed to fear. Pushkin since release from exile — he heard — had given himself over to every kind of dissipation and was carrying on like a madman. He liked Pushkin. He understood perfectly that he lived only for the moment, never with any wise premeditation for self or the future. He would tell his father in to-night's letter that he thought Pushkin had the feverish, brilliant instability of things that cannot last. He is the frail, gleaming flower of the moment — because the changes upon him are so rapid. There is African gloom in him. Sometimes the old fears of the jungle are stirring in his heart. Along with his wit, his fashionable *savoir-faire* — his elegance — he has some of the instincts, the bestial afflictions of the Negro. A most complex person!

Just at this moment he heard Pushkin ask Schukowsky where General Paskievich was — and Griboiedov, the powerful young

playwright — since men of Russia were represented here. Evidently the question displeased Schukowsky. He would bet that Pushkin got a pinch or a kick under the table to keep still. Something up — there! He would remember. He had met them both at the ball — the sad-faced but sharp-tongued writer of plays, and the General. Why were they not here? It would be an interesting letter he would dispatch to-night! Never before had he had a chance to observe so many intricate, intertangling, swift-moving, shining currents of life, of personal interest.

How elegant was young Odojewsky! Humanly speaking he was a precious decoration. Slender, blue-eyed, blond, he sat on his side of the table; he was wearing the most costly habiliments. He was sentimental from a too babyish upbringing — and lack of strength. Bravely proud of all that was wrong or useless, he was initiating rapidly the cult of the ineffectual. He was powerfully connected; a social favorite. But he had the troubling, almost too sweet physical beauty of a man who is part woman.

Baratinsky — dark, svelt, resembling an Asiatic — nominally of Moscow, but contriving to visit most of the time in Peter. He was enamored of French literature and liked to pose as a scholar. He was a perfect lover gone astray in one of the fallow fields of art where he would never have the success he might have had as a lover. How handsome, how appealing, he looked as he was inclining his head toward Odojewsky with a slight gesture of affection!

Young Metternich sensed suddenly that Baratinsky was full of vain regrets which were constantly weaving their shadows about him. Regret tempered seductively his attractiveness in the present. He was a man women loved instinctively — and sought. But he always wanted something they could not give. He was afflicted with a perilous *soif d'artist*, which swung him out beyond the normal. He extricated himself from their embraces dissatisfied and sad. He ended a love affair almost as soon as he began it.

Baron Delvig, boyhood friend of Pushkin, a poet, too, was negligible physically and neutral mentally. He was a good fellow and a satisfactory filler-in at dinners. He was a sort of universal blotting-pad for other people's discomfitures. Count Benkendorf

was not present, nor the Minister of War. The royal family was represented by the bombastic word-spouter, the Grand Duke Michael.

Orlow was here, and looking old, young Metternich observed. He resembled a weary Cupid upon whom a too early winter has snowed. His famous blond beauty was tarnished, although of course he kept the proud, inherited presence of a *grand seigneur*.

Although Orlow is growing old, thinks young Metternich, he is still eager with his brain for love. It is this approaching physical exhaustion which gives him his insight into the emotions of women. In the retrospect of loss he can see them better than in a moment of possession. Viazemsky, his inseparable friend of the bitter tongue and sentimental verse, was beside him. There is a cleft in his nature, observed quick-eyed Metternich, which neither love nor art can ever harmonize.

Victor Metternich was most fascinated by Capo d'Istria, the Greek, and Pozzo di Borgo, the Corsican, because he knew they were the two men his father feared. It meant something for a man if his father feared him! They were celebrated soldiers of fortune, and finely educated. He knew that his subtle father, no matter how he tried, had never been able to throw dust in their eyes. He knew their attitude toward himself must be inherited hatred. But they interested him. He tried to catch their words. He watched them.

It occurred happily to the Iron Duke that there was no one of importance present save himself, Canning, and Nesselrode. What were a few poetasters, a few frivolous butterflies of fashion! He began a confidential conversation with the Chancellor for personal ends, which should exclude the table.

Canning's face became serious. All were listening, although the low voice was a signal for the rest to mind their own business. The words "Persian Question" kept occurring. Old Nesselrode seemed discomfited. He seemed to be searching for words. What an actor he was!

The dogged, domineering Duke irritated the irreverent Pushkin, who broke in: "Your Grace, the Persian Question is like God's poor. It is something we have always with us."

The table laughed. Now they were all let in. The near-sighted eyes of Nesselrode squinted toward Pushkin. Their blue, grateful mist seemed to enfold him.

Canning reinforced the Iron Duke. They must not lose this chance. They must learn the will of Nicholas whom they might confront any moment.

"His Russian Majesty — of course — wishes the Mediterranean to remain as before — under nominal control of the ships of the line of England?"

Old Nesselrode hesitated. His small body seemed to show his awe of the imposing Canning. And Canning at this moment forgot Moscow, the disgraceful retreat of Napoleon, and the dead bodies that dimmed the snow. He did remember, however, that Nesselrode was called dull in the council chamber. No wonder!

Nesselrode coughed. He moved his hands helplessly. The elusive, naughty Pushkin was amused. He understood instantly. He laughed again, this time a narrow edge of insolence tingling his laughter.

"Your Excellency, you cannot pin our proud epicure here to anything less important than a pudding!" The barrier was broken. The conversation was general.

The Iron Duke condescended to let the corner of one eye embrace the other listeners, as he remarked:

"The attitude of the French upon this question of the Straits is just what we had expected from France." Wellington had been instructed to make Russia suspicious of France.

Old Nesselrode found his tongue with amazing nimbleness:

"A wonderful people — the French! I am grateful to Your Grace for reminding me. Cooking — Your Grace — as a fine art vanished from Europe with the French seventeenth century and the passing of the *rôtisseur*."

He was off on one of his famous filibusters. Every one understood except the two Englishmen. The eyes of the Russians expressed pride and loyalty for this awkward old bear who knew how to keep a world at bay.

"The surest way — it seems to me — to judge a man is by his stomach."

"Delicious! Delicious!" thought Pushkin.

"Of course I have to judge — you know — as I am able," diffidently. "But what part of a man is of account — tell me — if his stomach is not fit!"

The merriment, the admiration that was shining in the eyes of Baratinsky, Delvig, Odojewsky; Pushkin, was flinging helpful words from time to time to the triumphing Chancellor.

"But Greece, Count Nesselrode . . ." began Canning.

"I thank Your Excellency! My chief interest in the excavations proposed there by your noble, your enterprising English race is my hope of an extended cuisine. I sigh for the superb moments of the past. A world that wants merely useful things is the basest of worlds. Its soul is wholly material. A world that has lost folly — pure, and unrelated to any success — has lost much."

"Greece. . ." began the Duke of Wellington dictatorially.

"I agree with Your Grace. And perfectly! Only the antique world that knew how to eat could properly appreciate pleasure. I suppose I have the aristocrat's contempt for the bourgeois, the useful. Like Petronius I can respect the man who would go shabby to buy hyacinths of Hybla from the plains of Sicily. The world that gravely exchanges pleasure for propriety does not know how great its loss."

Odojewsky, Baratinsky, Pushkin, Delvig, and the other Russians, were listening with a sort of ecstasy to the gastronomic eloquence of their countryman. More than anything else, too, they were enjoying the trick.

"To be utilitarian is to commit the supreme crime against the soul," continued the Chancellor.

"But the Greek Isles have always bred trouble."

"Yes — Your Excellency! I agree — Your Excellency. And your English Byron — what did he not sing there!

The Isles of Greece! The Isles of Greece!

The way to perfect the human race is not by killing its senses, but by developing them. Oh, my distinguished guests — with whom this champagne puts me in such perfect accord — how I wish I had dined upon pheasants' brains and nightingales' tongues and

eaten of the fat, white oysters of Lucrine! How I wish I had visited Roman patricians when they were idling at Baiæ! I could have amused myself in talking about food with Vitellius —"

"But Italy, Count Nesselrode, thinks that —"

"And so do I! I am grateful for the suggestion. The cuisine of Italy to-day contains excellencies. It contains the savor of ripeness. It came down from the table of the Cæsars. In it is the far memory of those feasts which Alexander used to give in Babylon when the burning of one perfume made from acres of roses lighted the sumptuous surface of a sauce."

The Iron Duke made a scarcely perceptible gesture.

"A sauce — if Your Grace will permit me the digression — is superior to a sonnet. Yet — the æsthetic problem is similar: What to put in; what to leave out.

"I sigh for the superb moments of the past! I sigh for the orgies of Sardanapalus — who gave the world its greatest witticism: '*I would give life for a new pleasure!*'

"It will be a sad world, although perchance a useful and well-disciplined one, when the princes of the past, who made the senses supreme, are no more, when the petty shop-keeping mind of the orderly, the niggardly bourgeois rules. Then there can be only pigs at the table of Kings. . . *Then* —"

"But governments, Count Nesselrode —"

"I was just coming to it! I thank you, my English guests, for the word — for which sometimes I search. It is the monarchical principle — unfettered — that breeds the fine human animal. Any man can work. But only the genius can idle!" Little old Nesselrode grew tall and fine and handsome when he talked of food.

A servant asked permission to serve the dessert.

"*The dessert!*" The voice expressed unalloyed pleasure. The golden aura of the moments of eloquence was still upon him. He waited a perceptible moment before replying. Just as he turned to reply, an orderly came in. He whispered in the Chancellor's ear. Nesselrode arose. His voice trembled. His face was grave with importance. "Honored Guests of England — The Emperor awaits you in the palace of Prince Woronzow!"

Pushkin was all but choking with merriment. Consternation followed.

"You will excuse us, Count Nesselrode?" The Englishmen were on their feet.

"But with what regret!" Nesselrode bowed. He put his hand upon his heart. "I am only a feeble instrument for the will of my Imperial Master."

The haste of their exit was equaled only by their joy.

"My young Russians here will remain for — *the dessert*," Count Nesselrode explained apologetically, with the faintest touch of humor. "They enjoy sweets." His tone was paternal now.

As soon as Wellington and Canning were gone, he turned to the table and begged quickly to be excused. Schukowsky, Count Orlow, and some of the older men followed him. He hastened to his cabinet, where he perfected arrangements by which the Englishmen should miss His Majesty throughout the night. "The Chase" was to be kept going until three in the morning. At that hour they were to be informed that Nicholas, in his haste and anxiety to be with them, slipped upon a piece of ice as he entered his sleigh and sprained his ankle. However, early the following day he would await them.

No sooner had Schukowsky, Nesselrode, Orlow, and some of the older men gone, than Alexis Sergiewitch felt that thin walls of ice separated him from his gay companions. It was something so peculiar it was baffling. When he addressed them, they did not seem to hear. Few of them spoke to him. Luckily it did not last. The doors were opened. The long rich sweep of rooms beyond were filled with guests.

Straight ahead he saw Châli. In front of her, bending toward her with an ardor that could not be misinterpreted, stood Orlow.

"Introduce me to your famous Pushkin," she was saying carelessly; "the one you unaccountable Russians insist upon keeping in exile."

Orlow caught his eye. He beckoned to him.

"To the first of women, let me present the last of poets," murmured Orlow, laughing.

Pushkin bowed gravely. His wide, gray eyes met hers without

a flicker of recognition. Princess Galitzin, passing, seized the arm of Orlow.

"Our lovely Persian will be glad to forget you! She has better company," pulling him away. "Orlow — tell me where General Paskievich is?"

"Isn't he here?"

"No! You know perfectly well he isn't — you panderer of falsehoods." Her white shoulders shone resplendently under the chandeliers, as she dragged reluctant Orlow away for a careful quizzing. "General Paskievich promised to meet me here tonight. That is why I came."

Orlow still protested ignorance.

Alexis Sergiewitch and Châli looked at each other apprizingly under the light.

"Quick — before any one comes! I must warn you."

His eyes became impersonal, but attentive.

"Orlow, Count Benkendorf — and Nicholas, are trying to find out who abducted me from the ball."

"Another 'Chase'!" laughing, instantly amused.

"Be serious!"

"You know about *The Chase*, do you not, Châli?"

"Who doesn't?"

"I hoped I might escape something — once."

"Orlow quizzed me. I am sure it was at the suggestion of Benkendorf."

"Well?"

"He asked me to describe the man."

"What did you say?"

"That he was old, fat, and limped a little."

"I am delighted. I am accused of something new!" Pushkin doubled up with forgetful laughter.

"It is no laughing matter!"

That recklessness which Victor Metternich had sensed so readily was something deeper than a surface expression, although now his face was grave again.

Her eyes were looking beyond him now. Something like fear, he thought, for an instant dilated them and lent a disappearing

sparkle to their depths. Pozzo di Borgo and Capo d'Istria were coming toward them.

Swiftly, gracefully, he inclined his body. He moved away, remembering gratefully, as he did so, the tone her voice had taken when she warned him.

"What pleasure for us to greet together so fair an enemy!" Count Pozzo di Borgo, the Corsican, who looked a good deal like Napoleon whom he had known, lifted her hand — with mock gravity — to his lips. "I was just telling Capo d'Istria here that he did not appreciate the honor of having death suspended above his head, by a hand like this."

For years the spies of Metternich had trailed them both. The Austrian Prince still kept a price upon their heads. They were enjoying the close view of the woman who once had enthralled the senses of Metternich. Their highly trained, complex minds could lay aside animosity toward her the spy, and estimate accurately the desirableness of her the woman.

She was thinking that at close, conversational range, Count di Borgo — in the early fifties — had some of the power to charm that had been Alexander's, and that the younger, haughty, eagle-eyed Capo d'Istria had been nicknamed "the seventh wise man."

"You will be leaving soon — I suppose — for the festivities in Vienna?" questioned di Borgo in a voice that was too amiable.

"An idle traveler, like myself, comes and goes."

She recalled as she spoke the irresistible charm of the letters of Metternich, despite their masterly concealment, their power to deceive.

"Already," added Capo d'Istria indifferently, "His Austrian Majesty has made Countess the young girl of the people whom Prince Metternich is to marry. A genuine love match!"

The words swept the firm ground away from beneath her feet. This was just what Capo d'Istria had reckoned upon. Her future suddenly clattered down in ruin about her.

As penetrating as they were, however, they could not measure the full force of their words. Her face was trained to conceal her thoughts. She laughed lightly. She parried easily. Did she know? Or did she not know? They both hoped, however, that they had

rendered less loyal — perhaps made faithless — the powerful spy of their lifelong foe. Anyway, they would not let her get away easily. They would probe the wound to its depths. The opportunity was theirs.

Odojewsky, Baratinsky, Baron Delvig, and some foreigners were paying court to Princess Bagration. She lived alone in Petersburg the most of the time. The Prince remained upon one or another of his estates where he devoted his fortune to bettering the condition of the poor.

Odojewsky was wishing bitterly that the others would leave and he could have the Princess to himself. She was perverse, cold, phlegmatic, emotionlessly voluptuous. She was an unpoetic sensualist. Creamy-surfaced, large-boned, intellectually dull. She resembled a thick-petaled jessamine of the south. Her eyes were the hue of degenerate emeralds, or sea water, in the cold north. But the lashes that shaded them were black. She was a woman whose brain had gone to sleep, and who lived now with the developed powers of her body. She liked Odojewsky in the same way she would have liked an uncatalogued flower in her garden. If she found him attractive, it was because she could feel emotion only for weak men. Her marriage had been solely for convenience and money.

Victor Metternich, in whose emaciated face his eyes to-night were sad, purple splashes, kept one hand in his pocket where he fingered that gold and gemmed inkwell — with which he pursued everywhere his mania of autograph collecting. Countess Nesselrode was saying apparently unwise things which she wished every one to hear. Old Nesselrode was looking meek and disarmingly sympathetic. He had on his most successful about-to-disappear air.

New guests were arriving; dancers from the ballet; actors from the Alexander Theater; foppish, insolent officers of the Guard, exotically dressed envoys with their suites. Victor Metternich welcomed the *ballerinas*. He did not enjoy women of the upper class.

As Châli listened to the increasingly bitter probing of her tormentors, who had her at bay, so to speak, her eyes automatically

swept the vast, glowing rooms, as if indifferently. Princess Galitzin was still searching for General Paskievich. She knew all about that incipient affair. Pushkin's frail, gray-satin figure seemed restless, lonely, and unable to attach itself anywhere. Her eyes followed him as her inquisitors tried first to crush and then to dissect her. The handsome Baratinsky — like Pushkin — seemed to be pursuing a quest for the something he could never find, but for which he thirsted.

The dance music began. Count di Borgo and Capo d'Istria — satisfied at length with their persecution — bowed and left. She was alone. She was grateful for rest. A sadly frivolous Viennese waltz pulsed languorously upon the air. She sought a corner with a safe wall of incurious foreigners in front of her to protect her.

Suddenly some one grasped both her hands. The pale face of Pushkin was bending toward her. Instantly she sensed his mood. She realized that he was dominating her from some superior emotional height which she could not reach. She felt sweep confusingly about and about her mounting waves of that amorous, that virile energy, which in moments of passion gave him power and made him great. There was something in the release of the moment that was ardent, savage, something that conjured up a distant land for which she was homesick and lonely. Then a weakness, grateful, self-obliterating as an anæsthetic dulled her nerves, made limp her body, pushing farther and farther away the agonizing memory of di Borgo and Capo d'Istria. A voice she knew she liked was whispering in her ear:

"Look as if I were remarking: 'It will be a fine day to-morrow.' I am leaving the ball now. This is my good-night to you."

In the narrow space between them she measured the ebb and swing of emotion. The dizzy flame of their blood was flickering there. The silence lasted a few moments. Then the voice deepened. It grew richer. It was close beside her ear so that no one else could hear.

"Remember — the day will come when I shall be your lover!"

He was gone. She was left alone.

Pushkin stepped outside. The lonely immensity of night and winter enfolded his slender figure. The wind whipped about him.

A storm was beginning. Wet snow was falling now in large soft flakes like plumes. It clung to him tenaciously like a garment of grief.

Through the night and the storm the Iron Duke and Canning were driving excitedly from palace to palace. When they went to bed — in the hour of morning — they both wrote letters to England, explaining that to-night a slight accident — not of their own making, however — caused them to miss His Russian Majesty. They closed with the pompous assurance: "There is nothing else — of course — for him to do but be guided by our superior ability."

As such letters reached England too regularly, irreverent Canning read them and cursed. But it was to his personal advantage now to have Wellington out of the country.

For his cousin, Stratford Canning, the great English Minister cherished a feeling that wavered feebly between regret and contempt.

CHAPTER V

THE WAR COUNCIL

WHILE the "Little Supper" was in progress in the palace of old Nesselrode, Nicholas, who had not had the slightest intention of being present, was sitting calmly in his cabinet reading a letter from Count Lieven, his ambassador in London. Certain portions of the letter of this valued councilor — the only one he could trust to spy out the motives of England, and England's cunning Minister, Canning, and then combat them — impressed him.

. . . By sheer ability, Your Majesty knows, Canning leaped from poverty to be Minister for Foreign Affairs, and just now he has leaped to the first place of delegated power in the United Kingdom. But Metternich, of course, is our natural ally, not only as regards the attitude of his mind to this unsettled new world, but — geographically speaking — because his land lies adjacent to us and his political problems have a similar objective. At the same time his masterly ability, his guile, his zest for the advancement of Austria, make it necessary to watch him. And that, Canning is doing for us because he hates him. This hatred makes Metternich resort to anything to keep in favor with us. This makes Metternich more subservient to us.

Canning sent Wellington to Russia because he believed he would be temperamentally agreeable to Your Majesty. He believed Wellington could gain you over for England and put a stop to the danger of a Persian, a Turkish war. At the same time Canning wanted him away — at great distance as possible — because he fears Wellington has ambition to supplant him in the Ministry. Thirdly, the fame that fell to Wellington in the downfall of Napoleon made it imperative his country give him something, recognize his merit. Right here is the fault — one of the faults, at least — of Canning. He longs to kill too many birds with the same stone.

He has ordered Wellington to keep England's protectorate of the Mediterranean intact, to make Greece subservient to Turkey — while nominally protecting Greece for speech of nations — and, most important, keep the roads open for display of England's greed in the East. This means India. But it was for the battle-field Wellington was made,

and not for diplomacy. He has great skill in arguing with a cannon ball, but none at all with a privy councilor. He has force instead of subtlety; insistence instead of charm. His persuasive powers are nil.

Canning's policy — like that of your sainted brother, Alexander — is purely personal. (God grant peace unto his soul!) It cannot survive the life of Canning. Here I make bold to communicate to Your Majesty an important secret. Canning is ill. They are trying to conceal the fact. He may die at any moment.

Canning belongs to the new school of diplomacy; Metternich to the old. One reason they do not agree! Canning believes that religion, language, should become the rightful boundaries of nations, and that such things as balance of power are out of date and need to be replaced by something more intelligent, more broadly useful. In Canning's heart — because he was born a plebeian — there is very little reverence for the aristocratic ideal, to which Metternich, born a Prince, has given his life. What loyalty he has is probably merely personal, because it gives him his present position.

Canning used to believe — in his first green, young, stepping up into the upper class — in hereditary autocracy. But that usually happens when a man gets out of the place in which he was born. He is dazzled for the moment. Socially speaking, it is not a salutary thing to happen. No man ever entirely recovers from its unsettlement.

And then the French Revolution came! It gave him new eyes. With new eyes he saw a new world. He believed now not only that a new but a different programme must be adopted, if there was to be any progress of any kind, not to mention reasonable present stability.

No one realizes better than Canning that the Old World is gone — and forever. What the people who do not think and are unable to observe consider to be its present reality is merely the noisy rushing past and into oblivion — upon the River of Time — of its broken, its disconnected fragments.

The question now is to keep what we can and adjust ourselves without too much discomfort, too much confessing of weakness. It is his duty to preserve England, just as it is our duty to preserve Russia. Of course he will set about doing it in ways that seem best to him, in ways that are possible for him. He cannot be blamed for that.

His natural instincts, however, are not the natural instincts of the Englishman. He does not have his inherited sea-robbing lust, nor his conceited faith in self and self's superiority. England does not understand him. England is not always loyal to him. No one can estimate what he might have done if England had liked him and stood by him.

England cannot relish — any more than we, or Metternich — the too frequently changing weather of his Irish mind, nor his bold, undressed stating of facts. When England plunders, she thinks it proper to proclaim an act of prayer.

Metternich declares he is a play actor. But that is because he does not wish to call him something that would be a compliment — namely; a wit. Wit of the kind that is Canning's is the one power with which Metternich is unable to contend. He is the only man who can make Metternich lose self-control.

It is my observation — with Your Majesty's gracious permission — that the quality that astonishes the English most in Canning (and works against a perfectly unified policy of people and state) is that Canning does not love himself. An Englishman cannot understand any one who loves any one else.

But his influence has been considerable upon the Continent in general! We must admit it. He has made this an age of epigram, which the proud Metternich considers undignified. He insinuates that it is one of Canning's back-stairs' amusements — flinging a stone at his humble birth. But it is one of the visible progressions of the present! It is a progression of the pen lessening the supremacy of the sword. It is one of the new brooms that does not neglect anything in its sweeping.

It is in my humble opinion — and again with Your Majesty's gracious permission — an indication of power that Canning is able to look with indulgence upon a confused world that is forced to change its mind — and too speedily — about almost everything. His seeing contains the impersonal detachment of intellect. This is power.

He understands that there must be anger, suffering, untangible complexities, mistakes, despair. He knows how to be patient. He knows how to wait — partly because he was born a plebeian. The princely Metternich is impatient. He will not wait. In his inherited blood there is command — then speedy fulfillment.

As I stated earlier in this letter, Canning is ill. He may, indeed, be dead before this reaches Your Majesty. His personal policy then will fall. And with it the power of England.

England will not have — as Russia, to succeed Your Majesty's sainted brother (God grant peace unto his soul!) — a Romanoff — like Your Majesty (whom God protect!), who has inherited the swift, decisive hand — the genius, in short, of Peter the Great.

Watch England in the East! All her ambition is centered there. There is the place to strike her and have the strike count.

I regret that we have not now such military leaders as Your Majesty's

noble father, Paul the First (whom God preserve always in the realms of the blessed!), leaders such as Suvarow and Rimsky-Korsakoff. There will be need of them. Great generals make glorious their epoch and powerful and safe their sovereign.

But understanding Your Majesty as I do from infancy, I have courage to believe that Your Majesty will know how to develop just such another leader of military prowess out of General Paskievich, whom I beg leave to commend heartily to Your Majesty's serious consideration. . .

Nicholas finished reading with pleasure, with approbation. Lieven had improved under the tutelage of the letters of advice he had been forwarding his various ambassadorial incumbents.

The letter accorded, too, with the moment's plan; the council of war which he had called for to-night, at the suggestion of Nesselrode, to put forward the plans of Nesselrode. It was good for the world to dance and make love, to sin and fan Folly to flower, while he, Nicholas, plotted.

"Orlow will be here presently. He will leave Nesselrode's as soon as the ball begins — with my brother, the Grand Duke Michael," were the words with which Nicholas greeted the arrival of Tatischtscheff, Minister of War, and his aids, Count Benkendorf — whose presence pleased him so — and the unwilling Paskievich, whose thoughts were all of the rendezvous he had arranged for to-night with Princess Galitzin, of the famous shoulders.

"They come — Orlow — my brother."

The eyes of the Grand Duke turned to Nicholas with love and loyalty. He was about to listen — he knew — to an array of those pompous platitudes, those verbal ponderosities which he adored. He liked words better than anything else.

Orlow was not any too happy. Again he had been snatched away from a planned interview with Châli. He intended to drive her home and press his suit. He had waited long enough. This was the second time his plans had been upset.

Nicholas was learning to enjoy the sound of his own voice. He was becoming a willing addict to speech-making and applause.

"As you are aware, my trusted councilors, we are hastily getting ready for war. And in secret. The secrecy I deplore. My nature

inclines me to what is clear and aboveboard. The cause, however, is worthy. The cause pardons much — defending first and then extending, the orthodox faith." He crossed himself. He bowed his head. "And last — preserving the integrity of our boundaries. In fact we are forced. For no other reason would Holy Russia wage war. Duty first."

Benkendorf was feeling happy. It was himself speaking through the lips of his sovereign. He estimated his increasing influence.

"Peter is now filled with coronation guests from various localities in the East. We want them to be happy. It is our duty. When they depart — with the spring — we want them to think that the great number of soldiers they see along the highways are sent there merely as courtesy by me, for the safe policing of their homeward journey.

"The envoys of England, too, are with us. We cannot announce now — while they are enjoying our hospitality, and we are so greatly enjoying them — that we are beginning war against the interests of England." There was a suppressed smile in the eyes of every one save Nicholas.

"To be sure, they were sent here to restrain us from the war. They were sent to tie our hands, which makes it more important that they remain — peaceful, inactive — till spring, and we preserve intact our reputation as hosts.

"Everything demands haste. And secrecy. The hard, deep snow makes transportation easy and desirable. The distance from here to the south can be quickly covered. Throughout the winter young men have been going in great numbers to the army. The festivities — the excessive number of foreigners here — have made it easy to conceal their absence. They have not been generally missed. The cities have contributed their quota. Farewells and grief have been forbidden.

"In the multiple complexities of our unhappy times it is better for young men to meet the uplifting, stern demands of war, of duty, than to idle in the barracks, plot in the cities, and renew the Decembrist disturbance. It is better, too, for the people to be amused.

"Because of my loving heart — my desire always to forgive — I recalled early in the autumn, certain Decembrists from exile. They were men who had had military training like Alexander Bestushew. We are in need of experienced officers. I forgave them. I sent them to the army of the south.

"With the same motive in my heart — forgiveness — and the welfare of my people, I sent Griboiedov, the playwright, to Caucasia, to be aide-de-camp to General Paskievich."

Again Paskievich was displeased and his face showed it. He detested literary people. "Griboiedov can be employed there."

"With the opening of spring one hundred thousand men at the least must be on war footing in Caucasia. Great armies must be ready and waiting, too, in Crimea. In Bessarabia. The army posts that guard important passways of the south must have, each, their quota. Reinforcements must be near, and prepared. Nothing must be lacking for quick, for concerted movement to cover a vast sweep of territory. The fleet must be in training, too, and warned to be able to reinforce the Black Sea ports.

"Only death and love genuinely amuse a people. Let the people have their fill! When we cannot effect change and betterment for the individual by peaceful means — as we would wish — we must proceed for the greatest good for the greatest number — and ignore the means. If love results in an increased population, then sumptuous funerals, with the best military music — which I promise to all my officers — result from the glory of war. And both to the glory of Russia. God be praised!"

The Grand Duke was delighted with the grim, graveyard wit of his imperial brother. His eyes were shining. His whole face showed it.

"We must have not only peace and serenity within Russia proper, but the lands adjoining must know our power, the security of our protectorate, the pride of our name.

"As you recall — my trusted councilors — on the day of our coronation in Moscow, Persia — spurred on by England — violated our boundary. Turkey, likewise inspired by what she believed to be England's support, sent no envoys to greet us, either in Moscow or to Peter for the royal ball. Also — Turkey

broke the Treaty of Bucharest. She began to massacre our co-religionists.

"We must defend our rights in the manner that befits our importance as a world-power — as befits our dignity. We regret it. We must likewise protect those who depend upon us. We must bow to duty. What say you, Benkendorf?"

"I admire Your Majesty's plan of first separating, and then sending away from the cities — young men. The army is the place for them. Now only Pushkin remains." He crossed his white hands with anticipation. He could wait.

Paskievich for a moment forgot his longing and disappointment. He became interested. He hated Pushkin in the way a man of action hates a man of thought and inaction. In addition he disliked artists for their own sake — poets, men of supple tongue and scornful wit, whom military discipline could not overrule. There was something within them he could not subdue, something he did not get on with. And to-night Paskievich was in a bad temper.

"I think, Your Majesty, that Pushkin is a dangerous man."

The reply of Nicholas was so prompt, so emphatic, it staggered him. "So do I, Paskievich. But it is his future you will have an opportunity to weep over, not his past."

"That reminds me," replied Paskievich, suddenly, and speaking with a certain emphasis, "on the night of Your Majesty's ball —"

"It is war we are discussing, Paskievich! Not balls. Be good enough to remember."

Paskievich was the only person who had seen Pushkin's mysterious exit, and his late, swift reëntrance. He had meant all along to mention it to Orlow. He felt that something was wrong.

For the moment of Paskievich's speaking, the sword swung dangerously above Pushkin's head. The slight accident of the momentary ill-temper of Nicholas had saved him again. The mind of Benkendorf, too, had suddenly become intent upon war. Orlow was sad, distrait, dreaming of love, and Châli. And Paskievich had been vigorously sat upon by Nicholas.

"Now, what have you to say *about war*, Paskievich?"

"The army is weary, Your Majesty. It is worn out with dressing, with parading."

Nicholas was displeased. Paskievich, however, continued doggedly:

"The subject — Your Majesty — is not popular with men of the army. They have no enthusiasm for it."

"Then, the sooner action whips them into enthusiasm, the better!"

"Europe has been burdened long enough with wars, Your Majesty. What we need now is peace."

Nicholas regarded him. The black, somber eyes of Paskievich became sullen. He was not bad to look at — either in anger or good-humor, this military man in the mid-forties, in a strong, manly, vigorously muscled way. His body gave the impression of having the hard resistance of steel. For years at a stretch he lived in lonely army stations, dreaming vainly of gratification of the senses, when he could have a few weeks to idle in one of Russia's luxurious cities. The vast military display of the autumn in Moscow had been arranged and carried out by him. Now he was beginning to enjoy himself with a new love in Peter. He was happy. He was taking his ease. The chagrin at thought of being sent away, of beginning over again the old hardships, the sad, the forced renunciations, he could not control.

He had had his say. He was glad of it.

"Paskievich — my General — yours is the single, the selfish vision of the individual — in not wanting war. Mine is the Imperator's vision — unselfish, impersonal, soaring above the present in order to contemplate the future."

Nicholas had no personal magnetism with which to control men. He had none of the magic which — so richly — had been his brother's. Paskievich stubbornly withheld assent. Disappointment surged within him.

Then Nicholas recalled the words of Count Lieven's letter. "I must get him away from women!" he thought. "The broader the extent of my conquests, the greater the war footing of my armies, the better I can oppose the forces that ruined my brother. He could afford to be conciliating." Aloud he declared: "It is not for

myself, but for the glory of my leaders I am planning. To the east of Caucasia — when the roadways through Persia are unencumbered and clear — lies India. That was the dream of Napoleon. That was his fondest objective. That was the dream of my august father (whom God bless)."

He watched the red glow of greed creep slowly into the dull, black eyes of Paskievich. "How base men are!" he thought. "How I despise them — all of them — and their weaknesses!"

"India's treasures of gold, of gems, of precious things, are infinite." As he watched carefully the dark face of Paskievich, he made a mental note to play — with him — gold against women. Both were lusts. Both were expressive of that emotionalism he hated.

From the lofty mountains of Caucasia — at once a throne and an impregnable defense — he saw himself dominating India. To the onlookers his giant's body towered miraculously; he seemed, for the moment, in the fullness of his untouched youth, to take on the iron magnitude of those rulers of old, whose sculptured bodies look down to-day upon the Syrian desert, from the fragments of forgotten palaces which became their tombs.

"My sainted father, Paul the First," crossing himself, "and Napoleon, united for this purpose, the taking India away from those trading colonies England was founding so rapidly with political intent. We have their maps for our own use. We have their plans, their estimates of men and distance. If Napoleon and my sainted father believed that feasible in 1798, what should be our attitude to-day? Are we weaker? Are we less enterprising?

"Paskievich — my trusted General — after the conquest of Turkey, after the conquest of Caucasia — and the adjoining deserts — comes the long-deserved, the long-awaited humbling of England in India. And to my leaders belong all the spoils." In the low, dull voice there was something that almost suggested a thrill.

"India was the vast, wild dream of Bonaparte. It fell and remained only a dream because of the death of Paul the First. Is it not our duty to make that dream rise again? What leader is able to do it, if not you?"

Paskievich knew that the result for himself would be glory and gold. The face of Paskievich informed Nicholas that he had triumphed. He waited a few moments to let that vision of Indian treasures work its magic.

"This paper which I give you now enables you to supplant Yermolow as Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of Caucasia. There will be nothing to stand in the way of your ability. As you know, the governmental head in the south is our highly respected Prince Woronzow, whose devotion to duty was so great — and who so understands the need of the moment — that he denied himself the pleasure of our Coronation Ball."

Paskievich was flattered. Orlow understood at once. He became more attentive. Benkendorf was thinking that there was no need to give this man lessons in trickery.

Tatischtscheff, Minister of War, at that moment resembled a fat hop toad who did not have the inclination to hop. "Nicholas," he meditated, "is afraid of Yermolow because of his power over the army of the south. Besides, he is noble and held in respect." Benkendorf remembered that the revolting Decembrists had suggested Yermolow as ruler *pro tempore* of Russia. His little white hands slipped apart limply at the thought. Considering youth and inexperience, Nicholas was not so bad. The Emperor bowed to Tatischtscheff. He arose perfunctorily.

"Even in his palmy days the wise Napoleon feared that cold, insular England which the mists blur, and which keeps the sea's slipperiness," he added with a certain fervor of hatred. The hope of ruining England was deep in his heart.

"We know that Persia is receiving yearly vast sums from the East India Company — millions upon millions of rubles. And Persia is obligated to use this money in making war upon Russia. If she does not, England will stop the income and then take away the trading rights of the East India Company. It was England that was at foot of the burning, the invasion of Tiflis — not so long ago.

"England has backed up Turkey in making war on us — murdering the Greeks — although she disavows it because she would rather have an Asiatic people — like the Turks — holding

the Straits, than a European power. In that way she controls the Mediterranean alone.

"In the beginning of the Napoleonic wars — the banker of nations — she refused a loan to Russia because weakening Russia meant the strengthening of herself — in the East — where her ambitions rest. Her trickeries are many. They are of long standing. It is England that keeps the mountain tribes of Caucasia stirred up and in rebellion. And now most dangerously — under Schamyl.

"In addition, the protectorate of Greece, of Turkey, are ours by right. A country so small, so far away, has no excuse to meddle in the affair. With our able Paskievich here guarding external affairs, and Count Benkendorf internal affairs, we may well feel secure. On top of everything else there is His Majesty's duty to spread abroad the faith."

Nicholas was pleased. He thought of the possible death of Canning. That meant need of haste. He was glad of Count Lieven's letter.

"Everything is arranged, Paskievich, for your departure for the south as you leave the Palace." He would not risk delay. He would not risk the possible word-indiscretions — later in the night, in some stolen moment of longed-for love — and the necessity of refiring his greed.

Paskievich's face showed shock of surprise. This young giant was going to have his own way. Every one was shocked, even Benkendorf, whose motto was: "Swiftness. Secrecy."

As he bade his councilors good-bye — and Paskievich God-speed — he observed that Orlow was still sad, still distrait. He understood. He sympathized with Orlow. Paskievich had planned to tell Orlow about the night of His Majesty's ball, but the shock of his sudden departure made him forget it.

After they were gone, Nicholas felt grateful for loneliness. He had worked continuously for a night and a day. It occurred to him — thinking upon the moment of Paskievich — that he was sick of the sight of continued debauch, which he had been forced to look upon ever since he was born. And now he was forced to order it as a means of diverting the mind. The debauch of love, of

lust; the debauch of ambition; the debauch of greed, folly, recklessness — all for foolish, personal ends, which to him were a kind of filth. From the unrestrained living of his ancestors he had inherited senses that were sated and overfed. He hated emotions of any kind. He even hated enthusiasms. To his thinking, they were poor little will-o'-the-wisps which lighted pathways of destruction. They guided feet that erred.

He and Metternich were the two lonely bulwarks, holding back the onrush of a world drunk on dreams of revolution, of impossible equality. He must be equal to the demands of the position.

He felt to-night that he represented the soul of Russia — young — pure — in reaction against the vices of worn-out France, and against the pagan eighteenth century. He was Russia, proud, but not consciously penitential — like his brother; because there was nothing to be penitential for and his heart was pure. He was Galahad — without spot or blemish — royal and praiseworthy, dominating self and desires, and wielding the sword for God and Duty.

That eventful night two other letters were sent secretly to the Continent, written by the only men who were keen-witted enough to know war was coming, and who understood the diplomatic game. They were young Victor Metternich and the French Ambassador.

The latter, Count Fiquelmont, disillusioned by long years of diplomacy and forced dwelling at many foreign courts, and now become incapacitated for belief in anything, wrote hastily to France:

I think Russia is on the eve of war. I really believe it has practically started. The object is to meet an enemy surprised and unprepared. But the army is full of discontent. Russia is too vast to continue. She will have to be cut up into five or six different countries. I have secret information that the soldiers in the south are on the verge of rebelling. Everything is unstable in my opinion. Nicholas is not popular. Fidelity to Woronzow — and Yermolow — alone now holds the south.

In the night and the storm, Paskievich, tortured with multiple emotions, with the savage contending forces of love and greed — disappointment, the dim, subconscious memory of what he meant

to tell about Pushkin and the ball — and felt it his duty to tell — was speeding southward for Caucasia and war.

As the wind whipping the wet snow stung him, he remembered angrily something they were quoting of that Griboiedov he hated — who against his wishes had been made his aide and sent on ahead. It was called "God of Russia." Certain words stuck in his mind:

God of mines and snowstorms —
God of cold — of sleeping places without beds —

He cursed his luck as the lights of the lascivious city, where he longed to linger, became dim, disappearing like the stars, and loneliness spread before him.

CHAPTER VI

A VOICE OUT OF THE PAST

THROUGH an imposing and impossible twilight that fell ponderously in mid-afternoon, with frozen mist that seemed static near the ground, and high up shadows that blurred blackly and clung to tall building tops, Alexis Sergiewich trudged along — to save carriage fare — to call upon his parents. They had spent the winter in Peter for sake of the coronation gayeties. Now they were going back to Moscow.

He did not arrive in too elastic spirits. The various friends and acquaintances whom he passed upon the promenade did not see him. He blamed it on the dim, uncertain light. Yet he had to confess that it was queer they should all have the same difficulty in recognizing him. He disliked to think that some of them speedily sought the outer edge of the walk, while others observed intently an object at a distance.

"Sorry to see you! Sorry to see you!" his father's windmill tongue began to rattle, as soon as he came within speaking distance.

"What's up?"

"You can ask?" wrathfully. "Your unseemly conduct at Nesselrode's supper. That's what's up. It's the gossip of Peter — your insolence! You should have held your tongue — and listened."

Here he took snuff, and sneezed violently, struggling to talk while he sneezed, and give orders to servants who were packing, strapping up bags and boxes, and hauling in trunks.

"O Lord! O Lord! And I was just enjoying myself a little —"

"Your mother Nadezhda Nicolaevna and I — after our hard-working life. Princess Yousoupoff declared she could recall just how handsome my legs looked at a state ball given by Paul the First," simpered the old voluptuary, who was indifferent to most things save society and his personal comfort. "And Na-

dezhda Nicolaevna — that day — won four hundred rubles at bézique at Princess Galitzin's — and it was about the only day I can remember when your brother Leo was not drunk. As for me, I have lost enough at cards this winter not to need any more earthly afflictions — with gout, too — usually on Monday — in my left big toe — and now for Moscow. Your mother, Nadezhda Nicolaevna, must have some — some — *some, some* clothes," looking wrathfully at a lackey who had bungled and dropped on end a box too heavy for a single person to lift. He was choking in his haste to speak mouthfuls of words all at one time. "But the Lord loveth whom he chasteneth!" he misquoted merrily. "That refers to me."

Pushkin's easily bored, indifferent mother had dropped a kiss, like a butterfly's wing, upon his brow when he entered and then fluttered back to her chair relieved. Now she was observing his father choke and sputter with genuine amusement. All life — even that of her own family — was a kind of comedy which she watched impersonally, as something having no relation to herself. The overtaxed, hurrying, red-faced servants bobbing into each other so briskly, were funny to her too.

"Money — you say? I knew it! That's why you came to say good-bye."

"How am I to live?"

"If you'd stopped dribbling poetry — when I told you to — attended to your duties in the Foreign Office — you'd be an ambassador by now. You would have married a rich girl, too, if you hadn't been a fool. What are rich girls for, I ask you?"

"I have barely enough to pay for a room — bread and tea — with an occasional full meal."

"And now you'd like to have me give up that puce-colored broadcloth afternoon suit, with a touch of *point d'Alençon* — that is, if I should happen to decide upon that kind of lace — at the wrists." He got up. He sat down. He mopped his brow. He pulled impatiently at his neckband with a fat forefinger.

"Sacrifice — nothing but sacrifice for me!"

The lazy, scornful smile upon his mother's lips was threatening now to expand into merriment. If the quarrel did not become

too violent, it would be a welcome diversion in the boredom of packing.

He had been — then — just upon the point of appealing to her. He had turned toward her, indeed, on the edge of speech, when something arrested him. How plaintive, how picturesque she looked! Beautifully gowned — in this upset room — in ruffled ashes-of-roses silk. A necklace of large pink cameos circled her throat. Three long light curls trailed over her left shoulder, and there were round amethyst rings on both forefingers.

Perhaps the words faltered on his lips because she was so alien, so graceful, and because she never had had influence over him nor any one else. All his childish accidents had been to her merely something new to look at, with which to amuse her. She was always so busily occupied in pleasing herself and at the same time in keeping out of the way of discomfort and duty.

She had a fine and delicate uselessness! He could not help but admire it. And she had a sense of humor which grief could not dim. If she touched his heart at all, it was with a vain and poetic regret. She was something glittering, vanishing, like a hummingbird.

And now he felt that he could never speak loudly enough to make her hear, no matter how he might try. Whenever the present did not please her, she had a way of burrowing herself into her memories. Then it was just as if she was not there.

Suddenly he sensed acutely that in her thin, long-fingered hands — upon which the amethysts looked too large — there was something simian. He turned to his father again with fresh sense of futility.

"I am forced to eke out a difficult existence by gambling — with any one — no matter how low down. The censorship is so strict it is difficult to get anything printed — even if the editor liked me. I want to live well enough so I can be treated as a person of some importance in the great world where the powers of my mind belong."

"Powers of your fiddlesticks! You haven't any mind. That's what's the trouble. The very kindest thing I can do to you is to leave you without a *kopec*. That would make a man of you — if

anything could!" He had always suffered from his father's biting tongue.

"All my friends, father"—now taking up the argument in a new place—"the boys I used to know at school—as they grew older found some safe shelter for their bodies—some safe shelter for their souls—in happiness—or a durable delusion of happiness. They have fixed dwellings. They have incomes from their families. They have security—something they can call their own. I alone have nothing. I am at the mercy of others. I cannot get hold of anything that other people have. There is nothing but borrowing like a defaulter, when I know I cannot pay back."

"That's your affair. It does not concern me. I wish now we had put you in the Monastery of Solavetz!"

As he heard this old terror of his boyhood threatened, he found it did not disturb him. Then one of the serious quarrels began which shook his health by making feverish his nerves. Hard, unforgivable words were exchanged. They could not talk together ten minutes—any of them—without disagreeing. Each looked out upon a different world. And each believed it the real and only one. His father and mother belonged to the old order of ideas. This made life painful for him, and it helped to make him lonely. Some vast, sad incomprehension had always spread between them. He wished now that he had not come.

He looked across at his mother, lovely and useless, in her finery. He felt that she was looking at him with the eyes of a different generation. How far away she was! A period of time swept between them. Their voices could not bridge the distance, however much they tried.

But they who were condemning him were at fault, too, although they could never be made to know it. They had set the seal of their idle days, their idle ways, upon him in his childhood. He had gained the impression then—and he could not get rid of it—that life was made for frivoling. That was the Russian aristocrat's mind. He did not know how to extricate himself from that Garden of Folly in which he had been reared.

"I've had only one suit all winter—a worn, gray satin."

"It's your own fault!"

As he attempted to convince his father of his money straits, he gained the peculiar impression that the human heart is empty. He had always supposed just the opposite. His own heart was merry and kind. He would share his last penny. In the midst of the heated argument, when voices were loud and words were rapid, his mother had disappeared. She had a supple, personal way of fading out of sight. The last he recalled noticing her was being arrested by the unquenchable laughter in her eyes, when, in one of his apoplectic speeches of rage, his father got his mouth open and could not get it together again.

However, she was the only person with whom his father could not quarrel. He did not see his mother again. She did not come back to say good-bye. It was not worth while.

His father was in haste to be rid of him. He did not attempt to conceal the fact. He decided on the moment to console himself for this unpleasantness by placing the order for the puce-colored broadcloth now, with a Petersburg tailor, and have it sent on to Moscow. In midst of another violent attack of combined sneezing, snuff-taking, and blustering, Pushkin was glad to slip away.

He sought Schukowsky as a means of consolation. Luckily he found him at home and alone.

"How fortunate you have come. I am dining at home."

Schukowsky guessed easily by the gloom upon his young friend's face that he had been having one of the old, painful scenes with his family. For the first time it occurred to him that he was both hungry and tired.

After dinner was over and they were sipping a cordial companionably together, Schukowsky drew some letters from his pocket, with that friendly, confiding gesture Pushkin liked.

"Whose are they?"

"Bestushew's. He calls himself now Bestushew-Marlinsky."

"Ah — Alexander Bestushew. A fine intelligence! The last time I saw him, Schukowsky, was the night of the conspiracy — the night before my exile. It was in Ryleiev's house, looking out on the Blue Bridge. He wanted to get away."

"First, you know, Alexis Sergiewitch, Nicholas condemned him to be quartered alive. For the sake of mercy — he said — he

changed it to hanging. Then he sent him to Siberia for life. But last fall — early — he sent him south to join the army."

"What was that for?"

"He will find death quicker — *there*."

Pushkin turned pale.

"He is not so unhappy! Listen to what he writes. And then think of the fate of the others. He has escaped so far, anyway."

Schukowsky unfolded the thin, shining, blue-lined paper. He reached for a candle and pulled it nearer. The light fell across his yellow face with the deep-set, slanting eyes. Pushkin listened eagerly to the voice out of the unknown — the voice which he had never expected to hear again. Schukowsky read:

I wish you could be here with me, Schukowsky, to see Caucasia, which was perhaps the cradle of the human race. I wish you could be here to confront this great and tragic beauty that surrounds me — that uplifts — that dominates me. The relief — after the monotony of Siberia! And yet it is sad enough.

But here sometime — spring will come; a semi-tropical spring. And God will be good. He will permit these poet's eyes of mine to look out upon it, and to love it. It is a strange sensation, Schukowsky, to be born again after my living death. But something is gone that I cannot get back. I try to get back the old careless joy. It is like trying to mend a broken rainbow. Just as useless. But while I look as I do now — young — while I keep this exterior, I must still keep on making-believe, I suppose.

Here sometimes I think all lonelinesses meet. I miss so many things that in Peter we never thought of. I miss the lovely, satisfying women of the upper class — their companionship — their more complex minds, complex natures. Stray loves, though, help me a little to forget. Most of all I miss art — music, books, pictures. I miss conversation, too, idle chit-chat. . . Something tells me, Schukowsky, I shall never have any of these things again, something tells me that never again shall I go back to Peter — see any of my family — nor the old home.

Alexis Sergiewitch shivered with fear. He saw Bestushew-Marlinsky longing for things exquisite. He pictured his super-culture against wild Caucasia. This fate of war — perhaps death — might be his any day. The letter affected him deeply. Schukowsky looked up quickly. He understood. When he began to

read again, he had skipped a page or two out of sympathy for his sensitive listener. He would amuse him. He would make him happy.

The pallor of these dark women of the Near East is a thing of beauty. There are pallors here that set my soul to dreaming. At sight of them I have lived tremendously — even in this place of exile — and through what magnificent, magnolia-scented nights. Possession — probably — would have disabused me. If you could see, Schukowsky, what things dwell within my soul, which dangers of war, suffering, loneliness, and too frequent deprivation of writing material prevent me from showing to others. Not all the treasure chests of creation could hold these dreams of mine.

Do not preach to me, I beg you, Schukowsky! I love you too much. How foolish to spoil a fine friendship such as ours, by one little love more or less. How can it matter? Love — like a rose leaf — was meant for the wind. Youth serving chastity is something monstrous. And then life may be brief for me. Who knows? Chastity is the saddest invention of a decadent world whose desires are no longer imperious. You will forgive me — Schukowsky — and listen:

She is very sweet — this little blonde child of the mountains. She is not in the least like the women I used to know in Peter, nor the women of whom I am writing — in my tragic Caucasian novels. She is different — how very different! How can I tell you? She is to my heart what spring is to a world that has been black with winter. Now do you know? I wonder sometimes, if, in the future, I should be permitted to come back to the great ladies of the world I once lived in, if my heart would be base and forget her? Who knows? In learning to distrust life and men, I have at the same time learned to distrust myself. What is there that one can rely upon? But love I must have. Perhaps only because I am young. "*Roses for springtime and youth for youth!*" One of those Persian poets you are so crazy for me to get hold of for you, so you can translate, wrote that. *Youth is youth!* She is not much more than a child, but so gracious, so tender — and so innocent, Schukowsky. I swear to you, despite our life together, which God pardon me.

Here it is rough. All our pleasures — few as they are — are too heavily freighted with danger. But the loneliness — Schukowsky! Sometimes I think I cannot bear it longer. It is breaking me. It is terrifying. Consider — if you will — the distance that separates me from civilization — even the outer rim of civilization. Of course I am not the only young nobleman here. They are coming daily. They are

in the train of all the armies — inexperienced and homesick. I am sorry for them. They suffer just as I do.

For amusements we have drinking gambling, frenzied affairs with the mountain women. We, about to die, have not always time to choose, nor the inclination. They are splendid — some of them — physically, considered as animals. But they do not touch my heart, although I like to write about them well enough in my novels. They arouse the artist in me, but not the lover. It is strange, Schukowsky — and interesting, psychologically — that difference between the artist and the lover, two emotions so far apart and yet so akin.

They are alluring and pellucid, these mountain nights in high altitudes — these mountain nights of the south in winter. From a window of my room here in the old smoke-blackened fortress of Derbend I can look out and see where the Tartar Wall starts. It is a cousin of the Great Wall of China. It goes wandering miraculously up and down the sides of these mighty mountains. A world's wonder it is. It must have been a race of giants that built it. There are no men to-day who could even project it mentally. It is black with the weight of centuries. It is a relic of dead glory and forgotten kings — something mysterious, time-defying.

The wind is howling outside my lonely window to-night. It is desolating my heart and filling it with longing. The snow is deep. I thought when I looked out a little while ago that it was whiter than anything I ever saw. Black pines rise above it — wild — lonely. But here within by my side is youth — and love . . .

"A soul as sumptuous as Titian's!" exclaimed Alexis Sergiewitch, "dreaming there in the wilderness of exotic beauty — and trying vainly to create it, despite dangers and hindrances."

"He is of the opinion, Alexis Sergiewitch, that the war is going to be something unusual. Other letters have told me of the preparations. They are focussing the army near Tiflis, near Erivan, two strategic points from which highways make it possible to attack first Persia and then Turkey. Russia probably will play two wars so rapidly it will make England dizzy.

"The fleet is assembling in the Black Sea. The southern coast is fortified and provided with relays of troops. Paskievich will command, instead of Woronzow — the man who carries God in his heart.

"Bestushew sent his love to you. He wants to know what has

become of you. He wrote: 'Tell him to be wise — and listen to advice.' The slightest indiscretion of that witty tongue of yours may cause you to be sent to the army."

"I can't get hold of life here again — some way — Schukowsky. I have been away too many years — everything is different — since my exile. Or else things happen so rapidly I am unable to take account of them. Worst of all, Schukowsky" — with sad childish earnestness that moved the older man — "emotions sway me, and I forget just when I ought to remember."

Again Schukowsky wished fervently that he had let him remain in the safe enclosure of the distant fields by Mikhailovsky.

"I sensed it coming, Schukowsky — war — I think it was — something different. I have been hearing it in the wind. I sensed it in the sad music of those Viennese waltzes at Nesselrode's the other night, in the strangely unsettled conversation of guests at dinner parties. Restlessness. Whirling — whirling — a world in change, trying to set itself to a different rhythm — dancing — whirling — toward the brokenly new — away from the logic, the unity of the stately minuet — the stately past. The tempo of living is being made over."

CHAPTER VII

ORLOW'S PALACE

Orlow had been forced to give up Châli's coming for dinner. He had dined alone, her place opposite him empty. He had waited for her patiently while the dull low west took on dull hues of lees of wine, and the troubled twilight crept on, thick, vague. He was still waiting — but sadly now — while night piled up its thunderous threat of clouds and blackness outside his lace-hung windows, and above the palace roofs that topped the stately street.

"Why did you disappoint me?" were his first words, uttered with a haste, an anxiety, he could not control.

"A dinner; the Austrian Embassy. As soon as it was served, I came."

"Our time is brief to-night — Châli! I am entertaining — later, as I explained, the English guests for His Majesty."

"I'm so sorry, Count Orlow."

"It is lonely — to dine alone."

"Where is the Countess?"

"Moscow. Probably forever. When His Majesty sent Photius to the dungeon, she left Peter in anger. She has opened a religious school on one of her estates."

Châli's eyes swept the magnificent but lonely rooms, which tall candlesticks of gold, of silver, and cut crystal lighted.

"What a run of bad luck is mine!" Orlow was thinking. He was continually doomed to disappointment, it seemed. Life in Peter now was one "Chase" after another. Sullen Paskievich occurred to him, ploughing his way southward through the snow to war. Ah — war! It worried Orlow — its uncalculated changes. What might it not do to him?

"You are alone in Peter — so am I. We are lonely. Let us seize the present!" She looked at him inquiringly. "There is no need of it. Say the word — and the winter will be ours — for love — for happiness."

He was wondering what had been the effect upon her of the marriage of Metternich with a plebeian. She knew it — of course! It set her free. There was no hope for her there. Why could he not make her his now? He wanted her as he had wanted few women. His glance embraced her — dark, alluring, supple. She was a distinguished figure which his trained eyes caught lovingly and then isolated instinctively.

"I am like Prince Metternich, Châli, in that I have never loved anything inferior."

At the name Metternich he felt rather than saw that the deeps of her eyes changed. She knew! The moorings of the past were broken.

"Why not let me take care of your future? Give yourself to me! The protection of Orlow — who stands closer to the Emperor than any other man — and the wealth of Orlow are worth while."

Her resistance, which he did not understand, he felt to be lessened to-night. But there was still something in the way — something baffling, unreachable. "Am I getting too old for a woman to love?" he wondered with a quick pain at his heart.

She was proud of the admiration of Orlow, but it was Pushkin who moved her. The night of Nesselrode's supper he had swept her into the vibration of a great emotion, and she could not forget it. She could not get free from it. Still it dominated her. The ageing Orlow could not give her moments like that.

And yet — youth could not always be hers. The first of it was over now. With youth — beauty would go — and then her usefulness in her present position. After that, ease, luxurious living. No matter what the attitude toward her personally of Metternich since his marriage, that spendthrift had all that he could do to look after his own future. Then what would become of her? Wisdom lay this way — with Orlow. But she could not make up her mind to it just now.

As Orlow observed her wistfully, he sensed that she was illusive and distrait. He wondered why. She had changed toward him since the night of the Emperor's ball.

She knew that she must think of the future. She had had

enough — at her age — of the wasted love of the moment. She knew all about its deceptive hours of charm — its cold forgetfulness. And yet — just now — she could not decide. The power of that imperious moment which Pushkin had projected still held her past reason's deciding.

The voice of Orlow was pleading now. Why had she not been wise enough to forestall all this? She had lived in a dream since the supper at Nesselrode's.

"My heart is lonely without love. It is growing old. Only you can give it youth again. Without happiness in the heart there can be no life, no desirable reality."

Suddenly she thought that, too. But Orlow was not the mainspring of the thought.

Youth came back to him miraculously while he pleaded and enfolded him like a mirage. For the time being, he recalled that dominant, semi-royal figure they used to name "Orlow the Golden!"

The hands of the ornate Louis XVI clock were pointing to ten. She arose. He could not detain her. To-night his home was His Majesty's. A curse upon it!

"Time — I must have time, Count Orlow — to consider." She spoke dully, without conviction.

"Never, Châli, was the present more uncertain —"

She questioned with her eyes. Did he mean war? If not, what? Then, changing the subject — "Even here, Châli, without love, I am sad."

"Can that be possible for Orlow, who owns rubies of Burma set in icons of gold, to which nations have prayed? Venetian velvets across which the shadow of the Doges fell! And Arab horses."

He longed to caress her. He tried to touch her hands, but she eluded him as she slipped on her coat of fur.

She was freer-minded, happier, he noted with sad perception, now she was on the point of departing. She was glad to be going. He could not conceal this fact from himself.

"When I first met you at Count Fiquelmont's, do you remember what you told me?"

She shook her head. They were walking side by side toward the outer hall.

"You told me that in Morocco — on the fountains there — the faithful have written, *Drink and look.*"

"Ah — there! Yes," remembering pleasurably. "There they drink in prayer."

"Will you not let me write upon my heart something sweeter?"

"What could that be?"

"*Love — and remember!* Will you not let me drink in love with my lips?" Her grave, deep eyes smiled slightly. Was it assent? Perhaps! Or was it merely gratitude for his words. She held out a small gloved hand. The door closed.

While Châli was driving home through a cold, which, though windless, was wet and penetrating, the guests of Orlow came. They were for the most part, the same who had attended the *petit souper* of old Nesselrode.

Orlow, none too happy, his thoughts engaged elsewhere, showed his English guests the interior of his palace. He pointed out for their astonishment the strawberries they grow indoors in winter. They were white as balls of wax. They inspected the wine-cellars where, carefully labeled, were the precious vintages of the earth. They tramped down corridors and galleries, between rows of bronzes, marbles, tapestries. They inspected gems. They turned over collected treasures. Now they were sociably grouped in the library, a long, dark room, half English, half sumptuous Italian.

The thin blue spirals of smoke from their cigars were beginning to float up delicately, when a footman summoned Orlow. In a few seconds, at his signal, Prince Viazemsky followed. They conferred earnestly. Viazemsky reëntered the library, and Orlow turned toward the distant entrance, where he disappeared to come back a little later accompanied by Pushkin who had been kept waiting. Pushkin looked pale and put out. Orlow's servants had been told, evidently, not to admit him. Autocratically he had overridden them.

To be sure, he had not been specially invited. But Orlow was receiving men of Russia. The Court Calender mentioned it. This meant that he was eligible. They walked along in silence together

across the glittering rooms, under pendent lights, the aristocratic ageing Orlow, and Pushkin. Pushkin was puzzled, confused. He felt again the sensation of the night of Nesselrode's supper after the English guests had gone.

In the outer hall he had smelled the peculiar, exotic perfume of Châli. He knew she must have been here before the others came. And in the eyes that looked at Orlow there was wonderment as to how much he had found out about the trick played upon him at the ball. He did not dream that Paskievich had all but disclosed the fact.

In the library his reception by the Russians — except Krylov, the fable writer — was more than casual, even cold. There was none of that old, glad, outleaping friendliness he had found in the days before his exile.

Victor Metternich, however, was genuinely glad to see him. He looked shockingly ill to-night. Lack of fresh air, the indoor life of the Petersburg winter, had increased the fever that was consuming him. In his white face his eyes were sad, purple splashes. His pallor was accentuated by the sapphires he wore to fasten his cambric shirt. He did not speak aloud. He whispered to Alexis Sergiewitch that he was only a listener because the physician had forbidden him to talk.

Pushkin was concealing his discomfiture beneath a proud, an indifferent exterior. He heard Canning express regret for the absence of Paskievich with whom there was something he wished to discuss. He heard Nesselrode explain at once — a little too hurriedly and in a voice that made him smile — that Paskievich had been suddenly called to one of his estates. A distemper had broken out among his horses. Many had died. He hoped to save the rest. Griboiedov's name was mentioned. He was only a writer, however. No one was interested enough to reply. Only army men and men of title counted now.

Pushkin's discomfiture was forgotten in merriment at sound of the slightly nasal, slow voice of Wellington: "Surely His Majesty will be here shortly?"

The dim blue mist of the eyes of old Nesselrode enfolded the speaker. His smile was gentle and enigmatic as if ready to yield

to anything. Just as old Nesselrode seemed ready to assure him, old Bobrinsky broke off his rhapsody about his wolf hounds, sired by Bagration's Napoleon, to explain:

"Yes, Your Grace! I came from the Palace. His Majesty, Your Grace, was just ready to start as I left."

"His Majesty," added the softly apologetic voice of Nesselrode, "who is promptness itself by nature, regrets so, if a delay is imposed upon him." It was Nesselrode's practice to seem to yield when most fixed in purpose.

Wellington and Canning were now in the best of humor. To-night! they were thinking — *to-night!* Those two brilliant adventurers, Di Borgo and Capo d'Istria were pleased. They were enjoying themselves in Peter, because it was the one city where they felt their lives were comparatively safe from the machinations of Metternich. His hired assassins would not touch them here. Pushkin, whose nerves had been put on edge by the peculiar circumstances attending his entrance — which he could not understand — was too merry.

Both Canning and Wellington approved in their hearts of the unknown — the invisible Nicholas. Nicholas and Wellington were alike in sternness, in love of the army, discipline. But Wellington could not deal with the Russian's subtlety. The other Russians were becoming more and more incomprehensible to them.

Pushkin was reacting slowly to the sumptuous surroundings in the Orlow palace. He loved pomp, splendor. An interior such as this caressed his eyes. His mind mirrored everything. It delighted him even if it belonged to another.

Wellington, influenced by wine which had made him heavy and pugnacious, and memory of Minister Canning's instructions for a private understanding with Nicholas and Nesselrode, which would stop an Eastern war — and leave England sole mistress of the Straits and the Mediterranean — addressed Nesselrode domineeringly. Nesselrode had the attitude of one who yields, but runs away. In Wellington's opinion the others did not count, save Orlow — who did not seem politically minded to-night — and Prince Viazemsky.

"My object — Count Nesselrode — is to induce the young, the inexperienced Emperor to put himself under English guidance. Now — Persia —"

Nesselrode put on his most diffident, apologetic air.

"Your Grace will recall, perhaps, that our Pushkin remarked, the other night, that the Persian Question is like God's poor." He looked at Pushkin, then turned toward the others. Then he hesitated as if confused. "We like to consider it, Your Grace, with the same gentle indulgence — but procrastination." He stopped short just when they were expecting him to go on. The reticences of Nesselrode were better than speech. Pushkin's long white teeth shone wickedly. His gray eyes sparkled. He broke in irreverently, regardless of the grave Duke's dignity.

"Nesselrode and puddings; England and Persia; Russia — politics and poetry. Your Grace — it's a question of minding one's P's."

His Grace was shocked. Every one laughed. They at once began to talk nonsense, these incorrigible Russians, who loved talk just for talk's sake. The ridiculous, stilted Grand Duke of the fat, flaccid, Saxon face and faded eyes, was delighted. He was trying to mumble it over in order to tell it again as his own.

Under cover of the laughter, Pushkin whispered to Victor Metternich: "They are a pretty pair of pigs — Canning and Wellington! Old Nesselrode is preparing them for a public roasting."

Krylov of the round, surprised, childish eyes — ideal eyes for a fable writer — had been listening intently. Now his large, awkward body, in the worn brown caftan — whose front showed marks of his gluttony — was quivering with merriment. One side of his face was paralyzed. This gave him a comic look.

But Pushkin's insolent, witty jesting had gone too far. They were not in the mood for it. Wine had made them irritable. Superiority of tongue was too evident, and lack of respect toward social superiors. The faces of the Russians grew grave. They saw the effect of his words.

The profile of Baratinsky suddenly froze. It resembled that of a stern, young Byzantine Emperor. Blond Odojewsky, beside

him, paused in the midst of an indiscreet, amorous confidence about Princess Bagration. He looked bored and politely unheeding. It was his favorite manner of dissembling. Count Cyril Razumowsky — who stood behind them — was handsome, dignified, aloof. He was an eloquent black-satin figure — resembling a gem of ebony. In his eyes — the memory of many loves. They made one interested in his past. His motto was: "Live in the present, and enjoy!"

Old Bobrinsky's five fat fingers — gemmed to the first knuckle — spread out like star-points upon his antiquated blue-satin suit. "Youth is astonishing these days!" he murmured. But he thought that every day. The high-held, somewhat haughty head of Viazemsky, whose lips kept a twist of scorn, was turned toward Pushkin.

Pushkin knew that the attitude toward himself of his old friend Viazemsky had changed. Viazemsky was surprised to know that, for some reason he could not fathom, he did not love Pushkin. Instead, he pitied him.

"Another unlucky night for me," groaned Orlow in despair. He was brought back to the present from his wondering meditation as to whether or not he was too old to command love, and other men would supplant him. He was telling himself that only two things can hold the fickle heart of a woman; gold and emotion. Just then this happened. If he had only paid attention and guided conversation!

He looked at Pushkin. He was defiant, elusive. He felt helpless. There was no guessing what he might say next in this desperate humor. He was sorry now he had admitted him. Before he could speak, Wellington was addressing Pushkin with anger ill-concealed beneath gravity:

"In England — a man speaks in public according to what he has done in life — and his age — his noble or ignoble birth. There it is not a question of caprice."

Capo d'Istria suddenly remembered that he needed the support of every nation to be made President of the Seven Island Republic — and in particular the help of England. He hastened to help Wellington by a snub administered brutally to Pushkin's

black blood. The handsome dark face of Di Borgo was inscrutable. But he was listening intently. He wanted to become Russian Minister to Paris. He was keeping still.

Pushkin looked quickly toward Viazemsky with something of the old childish appeal. But Viazemsky had influenced Orlow to admit him. Some mood, of which he was not master at the moment, kept him silent. He pretended not to see the look. Victor Metternich was sympathetic. If he had had any voice, he would have come to his rescue.

The slender form of Pushkin straightened. It expressed defiance. His black ancestors had not been slaves. He felt arrogant as any savage ruler. If his pocketbook — and his present title — were not royal, his moods were. For space of an instant the primal man leaped out to dwarf the petty slavery of convention.

He addressed — seemingly — Capo d'Istria, who had been the last to speak — for the purpose of attracting the poet's displeasure to himself and saving the dignity of Wellington. Pushkin looked toward him as he spoke:

"Because the intimate past of that dim continent from which my ancestors came has not been written and preserved does not prove that such a history did not exist. The great suffers annihilation at the hands of Time as well as the little. It was black, I know — but it has not been unknown. For the eye it has realized fabulous dreams, and now, when I think of it, I am proud instead of ashamed. I am proud — I tell you — because there sweeps past my brain opulent visions of piled-up, beaten gold; gems, barbaric and brutal — and a landscape, burning, orange-hued; intensities, in short — joy, delight — heightening to power."

The presence of people overstimulated him. To-night he was nervous, and the range of his nature was so much greater than that of the others that he swept beyond them. At first this caused surprise. Then it spread a disturbed silence through the dark paneled room which faint cigar spirals were penciling delicately. The hyper-civilized sensed depths of savagery within him. They disapproved. Then they began to dislike him. With the exception

of Victor Metternich, they hated him for the heights of emotion he could seize and hold.

Di Borgo, the Corsican of the mighty imagination — who was really a poet minus a poet's printed books — stung by some cross-current of sympathy, came to the aid of Pushkin. Capo d'Istria regretted his words. He had not estimated Pushkin's daring. It was not easy for him — a diplomatist — to estimate a man who lived only for the moment's gratification and cared nothing for results. He laughed, and controlled the situation by remarking: "There are so many different races mixed up here that one half of every Russian does not know what the other half is saying."

Capo d'Istria smiled knowingly at his boon companion. The Englishmen were mollified. Pushkin was amused because the Englishmen were not amused. He whispered to Victor Metternich naughtily: "The good Duke's mind is like an English kitchen. It is filled with rows of orderly, serviceable, polished utensils. But he cannot get a chance to use any of them."

"I agree, d'Istria!" echoed Viazemsky. "Our Russian nobility are more and more like disintegrated particles. Some cohesive power is needed."

"That," argued Canning, "is why peace is necessary. That is why His Grace and I advocate peace, and the continuing of the *status quo* in the Mediterranean. That, Count Nesselrode, is why His British Majesty thinks his present protectorate is best."

Old Nesselrode's small, thin, near-sighted figure — in the depths of a comfortable chair of purple velvet — and in the depths of his cunning Slav soul — was rejoicing in the knowledge that while they were sitting here, talking foolishly or bombastically, the soldiers of the great gray armies were marching on to face England, and to defeat her in the East. He was content over what he knew to be the distinguished guests' opinion of him: "Dull — unless he talks of food."

Di Borgo blurred the question and rescued the slow Chancellor from the subject he was avoiding.

"World questions have never been more interesting to observe than now."

"The world is just as it has been!" observed pugnaciously the army man, Wellington.

"A new one, a different one is here now. My friends," went on Di Borgo, expanding with pleasure because he had restored peace—"the last, splendid, daring fling of the old life—is here in Russia! It is a glorious, upflaming sunset before the darkening level of commercialism, of æsthetically unenlivened material equality, begins. Right here—and now—we are enjoying the last of the royal past. First a period of vast vision, and then a vaster period of accomplishment, when all the old heights of life will be swept away, to make room for new ones."

Wellington would have been startled at these words of the Russianized Di Borgo had he not been so sure of himself and his own superiority.

"Will not the nobleman be always the nobleman?" he asked with mock condescension.

Capo d'Istria, of the black eagle profile, who had been educated for a physician, who was interested in every phase of science — a thinker wasted in a politician — sent up dazzling balloons of thought.

"No, Your Grace! It is my belief, Your Grace, that all the old, deep, reliable grounds of life are changing. Most of our habits will have to be forgotten. In world-mind a house-cleaning is going forward. The noble is losing rank. The world is not interested in him wholly now. The status of the man of the masses is increasing. This is the transition! The new world will be for him. That is — for the good of all, and not for one."

Pushkin was forgetting his anger. Wellington and Canning were finding fresh discomfiture in listening to Capo d'Istria.

"If we who are sitting here now could live on, we would have to learn everything all over again. The bourgeois, my friends, is coming in. You do not realize how rapidly. Wealth, leisure, education, will ennoble him, enrich him mentally, give him faith in himself, and courage. Rulers will take off their crowns and associate with him. A great prose poet, the present's most subtle, most accomplished judge and observer of dominant, rushing currents of contemporary life — Balzac — is at this moment beginning to weave an incomparable epic of these first days of triumph of his over the past, an epic which will be to the New

World what the Iliad is to the Old World — and to the past of my Greek race. The heroes of this epic will be working people, every-day men and women. This supreme master of the pen, announcing the time to come when thought will take the place of war, will present the supreme argument for the unrestrained rights of man — man of the masses, the vast, far unfolding of the possibilities of human destiny. He is trying adequately to show the astonishing evolution of humanity.

"They who insist upon keeping the old eyes will soon have nothing to look at — although plenty for regret, perhaps. To the unthinking, change — which is evolution — conceals itself under various disguises, called fashion. Fashion is something pleasant for the foolish to follow. The feminine element confuse it happily with hoopskirts and tights. This is merely a delusion minus a difference."

Capo d'Istria had made the two Englishmen forget His Majesty.

Prince Viazemsky — who led a lonely life in a great pale palace on the Morskoi —agreed, substantially, with Capo d'Istria. "But they will be little in some ways — many ways" — he added — "these men who are coming. We of to-day can both feel and think. They will be able only to think. Mind is growing less brilliant now, but more practically serviceable. It is passing from the purely decorative estate of the noble. It is pulling off the toga to put on the blouse.

"They will have a less distinguished range of tastes. Light, fashionable, passing interests will take the place of the rich, deep powers. Men of the eighteenth century had something encyclopædic about them. Prodigious personality reached then its apogee. In the New World they would be like pieces of furniture built for a palace, but placed by mistake in a cottage. They would take up too much room. The individual is beginning to disappear in the universal.

"The men of the future will have colder brains. Whatever grandeur of earth they look out upon will merely set them to wondering whether gold is buried beneath it or hogs grow well on top of it. But they will be adapted to their tasks."

Pushkin, Krylov, and the writers, having been sat upon by Wellington, kept still. Viazemsky was now a member of the Council of State. They listened to him with a degree of respect.

The depth of comprehension in the mind of Capo d'Istria was measured by the glow in his large, dark eyes. In the brain of this man there was some of the rich, ripened past of the Greek race. Some of its broken, brilliant, inharmonious fragments lived on in him. He was worthy descendant of a people who had had superior powers.

Razumowsky, who had just opened a new palace in Vienna — which was one of the show places of the city — and fat Bobrinsky were wondering why men talked, instead of gambling, discussing affairs of the heart, as in their youth. There was a lot Bobrinsky longed to say about his horses and his dogs and he hadn't had a chance. Victor Metternich was thinking *à propos* of Russia's foreign-born diplomatists. "They are the finest examples imaginable of the moired-satin subtleties of mixed blood. But they are men without a country!" Pushkin was wondering what was going on behind that pallid thinker's brow of Metternich, whose handsome figure was so appealing. Count Nesselrode, in the depths of his purple velvet chair — where he had all but disappeared — was radiating happiness. He sat up quickly, however, when a footman entered to inform Count Orlow that His Majesty was awaiting the English guests at the residence of the French Ambassador.

On their way, these two Englishmen discussed these unaccountable people who wished only to frivol — make love, get drunk, talk nonsense, and who would make any indiscreet personal confession. But they were impressed by the wealth of Russia and the lavish display. They disapproved, however, of this wasting of precious English time. The people seemed to have no respect for English opinion which in their estimation was the moral timepiece by which humanity was supposed to live, and regulate itself. To their minds, too, they were lacking in dignity and proper consideration of the moment. They had never met men who were so versatile, so supple, and so unstable. The Englishmen liked a

club when they had an idea to drive home. These Slavs preferred a rapier — and a disappearing one.

Châli — on her return home from the Orlow palace — found a letter from Prince Metternich. There was something in its heartless, its self-conscious grace that wounded.

Affairs of the heart he did not discuss. He was peculiarly silent about himself. He scolded — sharply and paradoxically — the times which were out of joint.

That intellectual sensualist, she knew, took his pleasure wherever he found it, and then praised himself instead of God. If God is in Heaven, is not he, Metternich, upon Earth?

He closed with the following carelessly flung phrase which lingered — "Be careful, my dear, of the flowers that grow in Africa! They are strange and unclassified. They may be dangerous."

CHAPTER VIII

THE LOVE-SONG

"We have read, Count Benkendorf and I, the two pieces of writing you submitted for our censorship," remarked the low, even voice of Nicholas, with its disturbing slowness. He fixed his clear, green eyes upon Alexis Sergiewitch. Count Benkendorf, fat, comfortable, and cruel, observed the two.

In the presence of Nicholas, Alexis Sergiewitch was puzzled. He was less master of himself. He was unable to understand the ruler's developed Jesuitical cunning, his power to deceive. The ghost of a smile flickered in the deeps of his wide gray eyes — so like his merry mother's—and disappeared, at the idea of Benkendorf being an art critic. That was rich! There were not many funnier things.

But it did occur to him that the silence that followed the unimportant statement was too long. Good news did not wait so patiently. Nicholas, who was a bundle of arbitrary but borrowed maxims, who if he did not have ideas of his own had faith in other people's and followed them, recalled the rule of conduct of Metternich: "Great events have trifling causes. Look out for little things!"

He leaned forward. He selected some papers from the piles upon his desk. He handed Pushkin his play — "Boris Godunoff." He remarked: "I have written upon the margin my decision."

Alexis Sergiewitch read: "Write this over as a novel. Copy Walter Scott." What a joke! He was frankly amused. His sensitive face showed it. Why the deuce should he think he can criticize a play because he happened to be born a prince! He longed to make a pun, but he did not dare. He longed to say the Russian word which resembled Scott — *Skat*, and which would mean — *Rot!*

He did not have sufficient duplicity to conceal his feelings and

make a properly subservient answer, the kind that Nicholas liked to hear. Few men were less fitted to understand each other than these two.

Nicholas looked across at the pale, yellow Negro, unable to gauge that changing, shimmering nature, that cared not a *kopec* for the Future. But he was amazed at the laughter in his eyes. That was not the way to look at one's sovereign! He knew now that he not only feared but hated the thinking of this man who sat there so defenseless. He was resentful that he dared not kill him. It was as he looked at it an injustice to himself. The life of Pushkin was a memorial to his limitations and his decree that the Decembrists should die. He marked the line where imperial power ended and the power of the people began. If he could make him sufficiently unpopular, he could take away that love that protected him! Then he would be at his mercy.

Count Benkendorf was not so impatient. He could wait and enjoy it. He smiled across at Alexis Sergiewitch in a fatherly manner. He caressed anticipatingly his little hands. There was something about the presence of people who were condemned that gave him a pleasant sensation. The sight of them gave him emotion. He loved to look on while men were being knouted. But he envied him. "If I had that brilliant tongue of his" — he thought — "I would be the next Minister to Paris!"

He was proud when he gave back to Pushkin his own first critical effort: "The Songs of Stenka Razin." He remarked pompously: "They cannot be printed. It is impossible to write poetry about a man whom the Church has condemned. It excommunicated Stenka Razin with Pugachev! I have indicated — as you will see — that fact upon the margin." He folded his hands complacently then, over his round, flaccid belly.

Pushkin's face expressed the frankest merriment. His eyes twinkled. Benkendorf's soap-bubble conceit was punctured and Pushkin did not care at all.

"My motto," continued Benkendorf stiffly, "is 'Orthodoxy, autocracy, authority.'" He stressed the last word slightly to make Pushkin estimate his importance.

Alexis Sergiewitch threw his head back and laughed aloud.

"I'm right in line with you, Count Benkendorf — concerning the first — *Orthodoxy*." His voice had a merry, boon-companion tone the Count could not relish. "I have seen the miracles of Photius — and I do not believe in them. I have not seen the miracles of Christ, but I do believe in them. You see, I'm there with the orthodoxy!"

Nicholas, who did not have a sense of humor, sat unmoved. Benkendorf felt small. He knew that he had been given the worst of it.

Curse that man's tongue!

His little soft hands dropped beside the chair. His stone-gray, spotted eyes had gained an expression that a less reckless person would have feared and then remembered.

Nicholas gained slowly from the appearance of Benkendorf the knowledge that something was wrong. He would permit no more replies like that. Submission was the proper mental attitude for appearing in the Palace. This daring thinking must be stopped. If there was any thinking to be done, he would do it. There must be more restrictions.

Men read too much. He would have the importing of books looked to. He remembered that slant-shouldered shabby schoolmaster, Kant. He had written something about "Might of Mind" (*Macht des Gemüts*). He would not have any such men grow up in his realm! If there were any might in mind, it belonged to him.

"It is nothing but art — Your Majesty! It has nothing to do with politics or religion."

"Ideas — be good enough to bear in mind — come only from the Throne." Nicholas felt the words were useless as he uttered them. They did not penetrate the strange individual. It was just as hard to brush the kinks out of this man's mind as to brush them out of his hair. With Paskievich he could play gold against women, and win. He could appeal to greed. With Pushkin there was nothing at all to appeal to. He was reckless and he did not care.

In the presence of Pushkin, too, there was something distinguished which he disliked. It was not beauty. It was not fine clothes nor wealth. It was something different and more effective

because less understood. While Nicholas was talking, it occurred to him that Pushkin was not wholly of the flattering moment, that there were worlds dear to him which the mind of the ruler did not control. An essential of his nature eluded the sovereign and could not be seized nor punished. He put this thought away in that orderly, well-pigeon-holed desk which was his mind, among things not to be forgiven.

He was displeased that he had not found out who played the trick on Orlow. He felt dimly that Pushkin did it. But he could not prove it. And he loved cold, unshakable certitude.

He had been informed that throughout the winter Pushkin had first practiced his wit upon and then been rude to the fat-pursed factory owners — and their wives — and the rich merchants, who were trying to force social recognition. They had proposed buying titles with their quick money. When he refused the titles, he felt it would be safest — because of general restlessness — to create a new order of citizens — between the peasant and the noble. He called them *bourgeois notable.*

There was a disconcerting rush of these people just now. They were storming the barriers of society. It troubled him. Pushkin, too, had made fun of, and then mimicked, his ponderous, slow-tongued brother, the Grand Duke Michael, whom he loved for his dullness. Superiorities belonged to him and his family. Pushkin had made merry over Canning and Wellington. There was nothing safe from that tongue of his! Neither he nor Benkendorf — who was estimating carefully now — could compete with his wit. He dared not kill him. For his narrow, autocratic nature, which was now staking everything, not only for his family, but the future of the race, upon the marching of the great gray armies, and the military genius of Paskievich, this was humiliating. Nicholas dismissed him curtly. Benkendorf began to rub his soft, white hands again.

After Pushkin and Benkendorf were gone, Nicholas decided to give himself a little compensating pleasure of his own arranging. He would drop down upon the barracks for one of his unannounced inspections. No matter what he told others to do, he saw personally — at some time — that it was done. Inspecting

the barracks served him the purpose of the board upon which the cat sharpens its anticipatory claws.

He drove along solemnly. He was a figure majestic and cruel. He was unconscious of the first gay blandishments — playing elfin-wise about him — of spring about to be. He felt no rebounding happiness that the sweet, forgiving sun was promising to swing back toward the Pole again.

The atmosphere that enveloped him was so diaphanous, so shining, so ringing with light, it was well-nigh unbelievable, and possible only here where winter reaches beauty *in excelsis*, and then bursts suddenly, like a gigantic crystal ball which a blind God has dropped, dissolving in dizzy sparks, in brief, in haunting splendor.

Drills, parades, were the only things he really enjoyed. Having entered the barracks, finding himself in the old world of officers and uniforms which he knew, where he had spent his youth and been brought up, he was at home. Here he could feel superior.

The Hussars marched past. He began to be happy. Here he knew he was capable and felt important. He understood this world. He watched for a misstep, an error. This game he liked to play.

"That boy. Summon him!" addressing the officer in charge.

"Look at that button! Fifty lashes."

The officer bowed. He passed on the command.

"The tall boy. Sixth from center. The third button is not well polished. Fifty lashes."

He began to fancy then that he smelled tobacco. He ordered an inspection.

He walked on. He came upon a pale, bent figure. The boy was hidden partially by a pile of saddles. He was scribbling upon a dirty notebook. The giant czar, towering above, gave him a painful, startled expression. It was like looking up into the dumb, dead-white face of the moon.

"What are you doing?"

"Writing, Your Majesty."

"What?"

"Poetry, Your Majesty."

"Here?"

There was a second's hesitation. A frightened hand held up the soiled book. Nicholas read:

> It is easy enough for our Tiberius,
> "*So be it!*" to write, than to sign "*Nicholas.*"
> But that o'er which tyrants' decrees have no might
> Is to say to the genius — the child of the light,
> Your seal of power's false! To your life you've no right!

Here it was again — the bubbling-up of that spirit which had caused the ruin of his brother. It was a resurgence of the folly of the past he had sworn to stamp out. He turned to the accompanying officer. He spoke in that dull, toneless voice in which he gave his cruelest orders. "Strip him. Put a uniform upon him. See that — within the hour — he starts for the army of the south."

"Yes, Your Majesty. I obey — Your Majesty."

Polyaeff did not beg for mercy. He did not dare look up.

The morning was not keeping well its promise of compensating happiness, here where Nicholas liked best to be, unless he could be with his family! He decided to inspect the sleeping-rooms. Everything needed his personal attention.

In the third room he found another boyish figure writing. The nerve began to tremble upon the white cheek of Nicholas.

"Your name."

"Michael Jurewitch Lermontov, Your Majesty." The voice did not tremble. The sullen eyes — in which there was no cringing — looked straight at Nicholas.

"Send him likewise to the south."

Still the boy looked at him.

"Your Majesty — if I may make bold to speak, he is too young. He is only in the School for Pages."

"Later — if you do not stop, Caucasia, for you. In Caucasia you will find work worthy a man."

As he walked away, the fearless eyes of Lermontov followed him. "Stupid, glorified policeman!" thought that brilliant, scornful boy who never loved any one.

Nicholas sought his carriage. He swung his military cape magnificently about him. He was enjoying giving himself up to the unrestraint of anger. He enjoyed it just as he enjoyed the stately military funerals which he gave his officers. It was one of his few pleasures, his limited relaxations. It took the same place in his life that drunkenness and debauchery take in the lives of other men.

Alexis Sergiewitch — outdoors again after the disagreeable interview with Nicholas and Benkendorf — was grateful for the sun, the first warmth. But he was intelligent enough to grasp conditions a little better.

"Nicholas is busy taking away men's self-respect — their pride. That is what he was doing to me when he made me sign those confounded papers. How I regret I did not run away!

"And yet I do not know how I could be happy away from court. The gay life, the luxury, and the pretty women!" For the instant he saw with clearness, but he felt a peculiar inability to act. "If I am saved from one peril — it seems — I am thrust immediately into another. Luck began to desert me that spring night I happened — like the unlucky devil I am — to meet with the Decembrists — and Bestushew-Marlinsky — in Ryleiev's house — by the Blue Bridge."

But the warmth, the happy light were so ingratiating! His fickle heart responded. He was not the one to be insensible to any joy. Soft, rainbow radiance was outlining buildings. It was floating a mirage above the ground — the distant ghostlike promise of flowers. He began to sing a little song by André Chénier:

Tout aime au printemps et moi j'aime toujours.
(All love in springtime, I, I love alway)

"André Chénier! A poor unlucky devil of a poet just like me! Arrested by mistake — for some one else — when he was taking a walk. Perhaps it was a rare day just like this. Never released from prison — and then beheaded. What's been done once can be done again! Something monstrous — I'll be hanged if there isn't — about the fate that follows us.

Tout aime au printemps et moi j'aime toujours.

He felt the sensuous music sweep through his body.

"True — by the body of Holy Isaac — of me! *I, I love alway!* Everything can go to the bow-wows — I do not care. I'll not be unhappy on a day like this. I'll do as I please — occasionally."

The old imperious desire for forgetfulness, happiness — never long absent — the white, caressing arms of women — came as pendant to his miserable morning with Nicholas.

He entered a club whose door he approached at the moment, where a snub-nosed waiter was sweeping out, and taking surreptitious sniffs of fresh air at the same time, and where he did not notice the fact that few of his old acquaintances greeted him or seemed to know that he was there. He sat down in a corner alone. To satisfy his emotion he wrote a love poem to Châli.

He forgot the present, the dangerous morning visit to the Palace — the brief fear the Emperor had shadowed blackly forth in his heart. His elastic mind swung back to Nesselrode's *petit souper* — where the wine had been so good. He was bending again over Châli in the safe, sheltered corner. He was savoring her beauty, her grace, and the moment's triumph. He was whispering in her ear. Upborne by this memory he wrote:

Desire — beside you — burns me with its fever.
With the fire of your eyes my heart is consumed.
Kiss me, O my Love! The kisses of your mouth
Are sweet as wine of Greece — are perfumed too. . .

At the bottom of the sheet he scribbled:

Mon amour! Mon amour!

He pulled a bell-rope. He called for a page. He sought bravely through all his pockets for money to pay for the poem's immediate sending to her. He laughed as he did so, and his disordered curls shook down over his face.

When he found the money and sent the messenger, he was obliged to tramp all the way back to his rooming-house to eat. He did not have enough left to pay for wine and meat. But he did not care.

Spring was high in his heart.

His feet kept time to the old gay love-song of the dead Chénier.

CHAPTER IX

THE RESTAURANT BY THE RIVER

"CHÂLI!" The voice was glad. Orlow had not expected to meet her. She looked around quickly, surprised, thinking that she was alone.

"Where did you come from?" with a faint trace of jealous suspicion.

"Home."

He was beside her in an instant, his feet slipping on the wet path. He grasped her hands. He drew her close to him hastily, without speaking, with a sort of thirst, she felt. He held her there. He looked down into her eyes as if, for once, he would satisfy himself of what thoughts unknown to him dwelled behind them.

She registered the subtle, chameleon-like charm of this blond Slav who had kept so much of the courtly breeding of the past. She admired this manly man whom other men liked and respected.

"Far — this, Châli, to come alone. Do you not think so?" with a gentle reproach, dropping her hands, still suspicious of a rendezvous in this city of unrestrained libertinage.

They were on one of the many little islands that dot the thread-like, interlacing canals, down which the polar waters steal so softly inland. Here there were restaurants, highly popular in the summer season for music, for dancing. And here an occasional old-fashioned road-house remained for supper parties, for sleighing parties in the winter. This was "Joseph's" — a lonely place — not patronized at this season. It was about a quarter of a mile distant from The New Restaurant which was the fashionable resort for the Court Set just at present.

"I need fresh air — I, used as I am to an outdoor country. Your indoor winters are hard on me. They make me restless. What did *you* come for?" — playfully, looking at him as if in mock accusation, in order to pay him back for his suspiciousness.

With that engaging candor that had bought and held so many friends, always ready to throw himself upon the mercy of others, he replied with surprising quickness.

"To moon — alone — here where I thought no one could get at me. To dream of love — which means you."

"How unlucky, Count Orlow!" determined if she could to keep conversation in the safe key of jest. "Because you find not the dream, but reality. There is nothing so sad as that."

He took her arm with a merry, friendly gesture of protection, as if to steady her steps on the wet, slippery bank, disdaining bravely her words. His eyes were turned toward the restaurant ahead with apparent interest.

"What do you think of it?" — proudly. "There! That bit of the old Russia of Peter the Great, set down in the midst of our frivolous French city?"

She looked up at the rough-timbered, grotesquely carven, unpainted structure. It had sharp gables. It resembled the dwelling of a Finnish master-farmer, with various attached outer buildings which were separate rooms.

"Come! Let me take you back a hundred years. — I wish I could!" in a changed voice. "That would be fortunate for me. In those days the Orlows took the women they wanted. That is what I am going to do now. Your feet are sinking in the mud!" He lifted her up in his arms. He ran nimbly to the wooden flooring which spread before the entrance. There he put her down.

Then he opened the door.

"What luck! The fashionable winter season here is over. No other guests! It is you and I — alone."

They entered a large, long room that seemed dark, because its walls were of smoke-blackened wood. The windows were small, far apart, and with diminutive panes.

"Quick — lights." He clapped his hands. Waiters — *moujiks* — came running in. They had on tall leather boots and *bouffant* blouses. They were young, blond, bearded, like penitential pictures. Their faces expressed the merry, kind heart of the Slav.

They ran to set flames — which began to flicker — to torches of pine placed in black iron holders along the walls. Châli saw leap

out to view suddenly a long, narrow, wooden table, covered with a bright, embroidered cloth, where there were metal dishes that gleamed. Occasionally the flicker of the flaming torches, as a waiter closed or opened a door, made a bronze icon, with the ascetic face of a saint upon it, peer curiously down upon them.

"I will be your maid!"

He laughed. He divested her awkwardly of her wraps. The stately Orlow — upon whom an army of lackeys waited — pulled off her felt, fur-edged bootees, with mock difficulty. He unfastened awkwardly, with fingers that hesitated, her dolman, contrasting mentally as he did so the peculiar nerveless calm of this Moslem woman with the women of his race, who are restless, talkative, and whose tongues are never still. He whose collector's training knew art values so well did not cease to be surprised at that super-excellence of the human body which was hers.

"The result of careful selection of nature and time," he estimated pleasurably, "working together toward a harmonious whole." When the long gray-squirrel-trimmed dolman unfolded and dropped suddenly of its own weight, he thought exultantly: "She is superb as Eve was superb — unspoiled — where Nature has dared to speak without restraint."

Then he summed it all up hurriedly for himself just as he did when he bought an art object.

"A woman of the East — whom the *morale* of an older world has ripened and made."

Orlow remembered then, from some other angle of vision, that even the long, somber face of Wellington had looked with interest upon her, this woman — who had fascinated the princely Metternich — and who was so desirable for love, for man's hours of relaxation.

He lifted next — despite her protest — the little gray-squirrel cap. The smooth, round, black head completed the picture his mind had been forming.

"We will sup just as they did in the days of Peter. How will you like that? No French cooking for us to-night. But I shall be obliged to read the bill of fare to you in French. You know you cannot read," playfully. He placed a chair for her beside him at

one end of the long table. He summoned a waiter. "Now, what will you have?"

"How can I tell until I hear?"

He read with relish, and occasionally phrases of explanation. "Milk-fed pig, roasted whole. Marmalade served with vinegar sauce. Yellow honey — wild. From the Ural Mountains! It is as fragrant, my little love, as your rose-perfumes from Persia. Flavored kraut from Serpuchow. This I commend to you. It is something remarkable for the palate. Once tasted you cannot forget it. You will want it again. Moose berries — from the Ukraine. I do not think you will like them. Their peculiarity must be acquired. We brought Wellington and Canning here. They tried them. You should have seen their faces! An Englishman — you know — seldom likes anything that does not originate in England.

"*Eierspeise* — with cheese. Here" — his voice brightening — "is caviar from Astrakhan — and the mouth of the Volga. Do not miss it! Bear's ham smoked with scented herbs. Ah — my love, that you will like. Try it! Smoked moose. Good, too! Stuffed boar's head."

She chose slowly and with evident interest.

"Now to drink. Tea — of course — if you wish. *Sbiten, vodka.* But first I would suggest just a thimbleful of old cognac — for comfort's sake. The air is wet — and chill." He ordered. He dismissed the waiter.

"I want you to enjoy our native dishes. You see" — with an inflection not easy to ignore — "I am eager for you to acquire a taste for things Russian." He waited, a little anxiously, for her to reply.

Her grave eyes met his. In their dark depths which he could not read the insistent, restless torches found topaz lights that matched in hue the lifted cognac.

As she ate, she felt gratefully that she was really far away from the present — just as he had declared — and its restless life. She felt that she was in a preceding century. She was hoping earnestly that he would not try to force her to a decision to-night.

They began to gossip as only Russians can gossip. They mentioned the merry incidents of the winter. They discussed

happenings of the imperial city, and the amazing conglomeration of races that had been here. Paskievich and his rage at leaving Princess Galitzin. Odojewsky's affair with Princess Bagration. They laughed over "*The Chase.*"

Then each was suddenly conscious that some undefined feeling made them both avoid the name of Pushkin. Suddenly she was afraid. Perhaps he had found out about The Ball! Then she knew that he was waiting for her to finish eating.

She could delay only a certain length of time. The end must come, and with it — she feared — the conversation she was trying to get out of.

"Now the hours are yours and mine, are they not? All of them!" seeing her empty plate and pushed-back tea-glass. "How many are there?"

She shook her head quickly.

"Why not? We are here — alone."

"Our time is brief — on the contrary, Count Orlow."

She measured his disappointment. She was sorry for him.

"How can that be?"

"My duties. I go to the Austrian Embassy to-night. Then — with Count Fiquelmont and a party of friends — later, to the Alexander Theater — to hear a play in Russian. Of course, I cannot understand it all. I am trying to learn. It will help me with the rhythm of the language."

"You are learning — I fear — the wrong things."

She did not reply directly to this. It was safer than countering.

"You'll smoke a cigarette with me — little love — will you not? By those two blazing logs over there!"

She walked willingly beside him. Her eyes glanced toward her dolman and cap — an upheaped grayness on a chair. Sensitively he noticed it.

"Do you always long to get away from me?" There was grief in his voice as he asked the question. Was it possible that he cared so much? They sat down side by side, in front of the burning logs — on a leather couch, their feet on the black bearskin outspread in front of them. The flames showed savagely Orlow's aristocratic, somewhat haughty, blond face, which was a trifle

weary. Dissipation had made him physically old while he was comparatively young as years go. Upon the instant she thought that the name Orlow should shed its dignity only upon dominant youth, because the Orlows had always triumphed.

She liked him. She was proud of him and his admiration. But the memory of Pushkin stood in the way — a futile, foolish memory, she felt, which it would be best to be rid of. Ah — *le petit souper de chez Nesselrode!* Throughout the supper, two words, which he had placed at the end of the love-song he had sent keep occurring to her:

Mon amour! Mon amour!

They had become an imperious music to which her blood kept time.

"One hour — you say, is short. Listen well — then consider." His voice was serious.

Consider. That was just what she had been trying to do since Di Borgo and Capo d'Istria had maliciously told her the news that took away her future. If it was their revenge, at the same time it was true.

"Political complexities," Orlow was explaining reluctantly, "which are increasing — the establishing of a reign under a new Czar — abroad — dangers we cannot gauge." He was referring — vaguely — she knew, to war.

"Any one — or all of these may take me away upon an imperial mission. I cannot tell. The ordering is not mine. Should it happen — I do not want to go alone. It seems to me" — hesitating sharply — "that I cannot." He paused. When he went on, it was in a troubled voice. "I want to know that you will go with me. There is nothing to hinder."

After another pause, seeing she was not going to reply, he spoke somewhat sadly.

"I do not ask you if you love me. If you did you would have said yes long ago," with a disappointment which was genuine and which he could not conceal.

Just what it was that stood between them he could not get at. It baffled him. He felt that she was on the verge of saying yes and yet he heard her voice say no.

"Can any man guess," he wondered, accustomed as he was to dissecting the emotions of women, "just what kind of feeling a man arouses in any one of them? How can he know what he says to her without words, physically? How can he measure his personal appeal, how he puts to sleep the strange longing which is sex?"

Aloud he remarked: "It is something — in these uncertain days — to know your future is assured. You can know that!" He was a little ashamed to feel that he must reckon upon material things to sway her. He was a little ashamed that he, alone, did not suffice.

"The best thing — perhaps — a man can give a woman is this," he went on bravely, sacrificing self without hesitation. "Protection — which means security of living, luxury."

"Is the haste so great, Count Orlow?" feeling as she put the foolish question that later she would be forced to say yes. Di Borgo and Capo d'Istria had uprooted the past. Not to say yes — sometime — would be madness. Circumstances — which master all people — would force her ultimately.

She knocked the ashes from her long, slender cigarette, carefully, deliberately, as if she were not worried. But — at least — why not grant herself the fleeting pleasure of delay? Why should she not toy mentally with what she wanted, but could not have!

She stirred turbulent longings and emotions in Orlow, as he watched her tenderly there in the firelight. She was sitting close beside him, gravely sweet, wearing a look totally un-European. It was the look he liked best. She was estimating all that it would mean to her to be protected by his wealth, his power.

"My heart is lonely" — his voice so close beside her ear was pleading. "It is growing old in the desert splendor of my palaces. Only you can give it youth again. In time, you might — through gratitude — learn to care for me. The Countess will never return. It is not impossible that a day may come when I can make you my wife."

Even now she could not bring herself to say the word which would separate her from Pushkin. She looked at him humbly.

"You are good to me, Count Orlow. I am grateful. Do not think that I am not. But — give me time —"

Orlow sensed that she was swiftly discarding one thought after the other. But what was it she was trying to cling to? He could not guess.

He helped her put on her wraps. He pulled on patiently the little wet bootees. She took a parting look at the long room which the darting torches streaked so dramatically. As her hand reached for the door, he paused abruptly. He spoke with renewed earnestness. "Do not forget. . . I may be sent away — far — where I could not see you!"

Outside the silence, the cold, the dampness struck them. It was a lonely place, unprotected, shelterless, on the edge of the waste. They could hear the soft lapping of gray water that shone. As they walked away from the restaurant, far downward, in the direction of the sea, there were gray levels such as invite desolation.

Every few steps her bootees sank in the soft mud of the uneven path. Quickly his arm clasped her. He pulled her to her feet again.

"Is it not depressing here?" she asked, yielding to the sad chill of coming night. They were by the edge of the water now. The dwarf willows, the syringa bushes, moved stiffly, but they showed yellow, swollen stalks.

"I cannot let you go!" exclaimed Orlow impetuously. "Take a spin with me — behind my thoroughbreds — in this thickening twilight!"

She shook her head.

He came closer as if to enjoy more intimately her presence. They stood shoulder to shoulder, the pale, wet tenderness of early spring — an unemotional, pulseless regret — enveloping them.

The dull, sidereal softness of dusk drew on. A big blond star blundered out and looked down at them — an unseasonable blossom, swaying unsteadily upon the breast of night. A crisp breeze crept in from the distant ocean. She shivered. She pulled her fur about her.

"There is my carriage. I must hasten to Count Fiquelmont's."

His arms encircled her. He held her. A kiss, swift and bitter in its recklessness, stung her lips. In the quick, commanding emotion of Orlow that overpowered her, she felt that the fierceness was all of regret. She was sorry upon the moment that she was able to discriminate so subtly.

Then with a gesture, in which all his courtly breeding was summoned, he said good-bye. She drove away leaving him alone, the weird, cold light of the voiceless water upon him.

He ordered his own coachman to take him to Prince Viazemsky's.

"Peter Andrejewitch," called his frank, friendly voice as soon as he saw him.

"Orlow!"

"Look at me."

"I am looking," replied the scornful Viazemsky, his lip curling.

"Tell me, Peter Andrejewitch, am I too old for a woman to love — for myself — I mean?"

"What damned folly!"

"My beloved Peter Andrejewitch —"

"Remember your ancestors!" was the stern reply. "You have degenerated. When an Orlow cannot get the woman he wants, he does not play the cry-baby. He takes another. There was Gregory! He toyed with an Empress. She gave him a fortune. He spent it upon women he liked better. That's the way your virile ancestor did. You are sighing like a schoolboy over a paid spy. Fie upon you!"

"You do not understand, Peter Andrejewitch —"

"I understand that she keeps you dangling after her, just as Nicholas is keeping Wellington and Canning dangling after him. '*The Chase!*'"

"Viazemsky! This is my last, perhaps my greatest love — just before life sinks down for me into old age. I want to keep it, Viazemsky — I want to keep it with me — to light the darkness — ahead."

"It is just a reflux of imbecility on your part, Orlow," replied the sarcastic voice. "It is a return to the sensuality of the primal

brute that makes you think only of her. At your age politics, affairs, my friendship — long and unshaken — ought to suffice."

"I am not wholly a man of intellect, like you, Viazemsky. You are an artist, too! You can put up with the shadow. I've got to have the substance — sometimes," announced Orlow, whose brain was eager to enjoy, despite his physical exhaustion.

"No, no! That is not it. I want you to have self control, which means I want you to be happy."

"You want me to be just like old Bobrinsky, Viazemsky!" he answered reproachfully. "Interested only in wolf hounds, sired by Bagration's Napoleon!"

"Wolf hounds, Orlow, are the safest things I know to breed," laughed back the slightly bitter voice of the Prince, who was scholar, voluptuary, poet and ascetic, but never one long at a time. His scorn demolished first one fad and then another, until at last there was nothing at all he could love, and very little he had a genuine interest in. His mind worked busily to make him a solitary.

"I am only in the forties!" explained Orlow, not at all offended with his friend's plain speaking, grieved as he was to feel himself growing old, unfit for the dominating of women.

"I know it, Orlow. But it is a day *par excellence* of youth, because it is a day of change. Only youth can put up with its discomforts, its lack of surety and promise. Not because youth is braver, but because it sees less — is less wise, Orlow!

"A man is *passé* now at thirty. Never before, except in the Rome of Catullus, has life been discounted so quickly. Here now, just as in Rome then, we skim the cream and throw away the milk. Under the swift whirling sun of change — presiding over the present social chaos — the sun shining hastily upon the incoming of a New World, only flexible, unseeing youth can adjust itself and be content. Annihilating forces are at work everywhere."

"But you, Peter Andrejewitch — are afraid to live! Now do not deny it. You know it is true. You do not dare trust to anything. You have grown old playing peek-a-boo with the things you long for. You stick your head out like a frightened rabbit,

and then you run back and hide. I go out to fight. I get hurt. Sometimes I grieve. You live like a man taking a walk on a holiday — through a beautiful land — but whose flowers you do not dare to pluck."

"Learn to live without women, Orlow, if you want to be happy — and free! Objects of art are much more satisfactory to love than women. They cannot betray. Nor do they change so soon.

"How easy it ought to be for you, Orlow, to give them up — women — you who love the touch of beautiful things. Caress splendid surfaces instead! Caress your Venetian velvets, the satin skin of your Arab horses. They, too, can give you emotion. Be happy in looking at your pearls, your marbles from Cyprus — unprocurable and rare."

"But my heart is lonely, Peter Andrejewitch —"

"Nonsense! You are not willing to put up with what the rest of us put up with."

"What do you mean?"

"This," replied Viazemsky, who was always waiting for some fine, some auspicious moment in which to seize life and make it perfect, some radiant future, in which he meant to turn himself loose and live as he wished. But in the mean time the years rushed on.

"That's what I mean, Orlow! It is a period when men of Russia are lonely. You are a coward because you are not willing to bear the burden with the rest of us. Consider a few of them. Baratinsky — trying to console himself with letters and art — because other things do not satisfy him; Bestushew-Marlinsky in Caucasia; Griboiedov — there, too; Pushkin; myself; Schukowsky — who lives for others, noble and pure; Yermolow, with the Army of the East; Woronzow — for more than twenty years in lonely outposts; Paskievich — miserable in renunciation; Capo d'Istria — ours only by adoption; and Di Borgo, our recently Russianized Count — to mention only a few.

"Russian men, such as Herzen, upheld by love of freedom, love of art — of their fellow-men, are living as solitaries all over Europe. They cannot return while Nicholas reigns.

"Herzen is in England, superintending the Russian presses

there. There is another group in Switzerland. There is one in Paris. Every one can find something better to love than women — something more stable, anyway.

"Now Razumowsky loves sumptuous living. His new palace in Vienna has been a lesson to the Viennese in interior decoration. Prince Bagration lives to teach and uplift the serf. Capo d'Istria loves science, and freedom. Pozzo di Borgo loves France — and intrigue. Nesselrode is an epicure. Every one can find something.

"The loneliness of men of Russia to-day is because the home is beginning to be given up for the first time. Change comes to us too easily — a young nation. Even twenty years ago what is happening now could not have happened. We are all at the mercy of a peculiar social condition which has never been focussed in art nor exploited — worthily — in history.

"The loneliness of the New World — the scientific world — is dawning, when man will live in superb isolation. The heart will die. The brain will live on. Already the forces are in action, which far in the future will make all men lonely and force them to be sufficient unto themselves.

"Right here in Peter — how many proofs of it! Once, when the great nobles came to Moscow, came to Peter for the court season, each one owned his own palace — for comfortable living, brought along a retinue of servants. Now they are content — many of them — to come one at a time, two at a time, and put up with a room in a first-class boarding-house. Groups of rich merchants, rich factory men, are crowding in and changing our customs. They are all alike — the commercial men; they are not richly differentiated like the cultivated noble. The individual — everywhere — is giving way to the universal. There is something vague, undecided — not perfectly flowered in our Russian race, that makes us more defenseless against the change. We are an unripe fruit of Time — upon which, too early, the frost is falling."

"But it is better, Peter Andrejewitch" — solemnly, without a trace of anger for the hard words — "to live life and suffer sometimes — as I do — than just to spy upon it. Your habit of observation has made it impossible for you to love anything at all."

"You are wrong, Orlow."

"Prove it."

"I love you — as all men do. Come! Dine with me! Then on to the theater!" flinging an arm about his shoulder, his lips losing for the moment their bitter curve. He pushed him gently toward the dining-room, whose doors the butler had just opened.

CHAPTER X

SCHUKOWSKY

"I AM sorry, Vassili Andrejewitch Schukowsky, that the books for Her Majesty are not bound."

"Been ill long?" inquired Schukowsky sympathetically of the old man, twisted with suffering, upon the bed.

"It comes in the winter, Vassili Andrejewitch. Worse in this hand in which I hold the tooling iron. Rheumatism. And now it is warmer, it does not leave."

Schukowsky leaned back upon the shabby divan, placed against double doors leading to another rented room.

"I will explain the delay to Her Majesty. The kind heart of Her Majesty will see to your needs." As he finished speaking, a low, growling sound, like the distant sea, was audible. It came from the room behind him. He turned sensitively. He inclined his head toward the door.

"What is that?"

The old man looked frightened. He either did not hear or did not wish to answer.

"A crowd of people!" The old man nodded. Single voices became distinct — one after the other. They were speaking with emotion.

"Do you know who they are?"

"No." The intonation showed he did not wish to talk.

Schukowsky listened. A man was speaking.

"No one ever led lives so dramatic — and at the same time so pitiful and brief — as the young Decembrists!" Just as he feared! One of the clubs. They had to meet in hiding now.

"And no other race has ever had such youthful geniuses — nor so many," the speaker declared with vigor. "In their boyhood — without any experience, without any training — they created like professionals. But they were dazzled by the world of Europe.

Its mental pictures were flung at them too hastily. They were not ready. They met thoughts — alien and revolutionary — which they could not assimilate — young, muscular nomads, too rapidly broken to city life. Their sins were youth — and too brilliant minds.

"They had — at first — no evil intent. It was bad law and an unstable government that called them by the name *criminals*, when they were not criminals in deed. The prodigious figure of Napoleon — that astounding, upleaping commoner — had unsettled them. And handsome Mickiewicz — the Pole of the dangerous tongue — had had bad influence over them. He is so eloquent he confounds men's reason!

"In the year 1800 the gods leaned down to earth, and poets, artists, were born. The divine fire was all but inextinguishable for a few years. Poets usually come with revolutions — when the souls of nations are stirred. If the blood of battle dyes with a deeper crimson the rose — it makes more reckless their pitiful, their wasted emotions."

Premonitory fear was tugging at the heart of Schukowsky. The suffering figure upon the bed either did not hear or made-believe that he did not. The tone of the speaking voice changed. It became bitter.

"Nicholas had no legal right to put the Decembrists to death. He broke a law to do it. The Empress Elizabeth Petrowna had abolished — long ago — the death sentence. With us, however, law makes no difference. If a law pleases Nicholas, he enforces it. If it does not, he breaks it. He is law.

"He put them to death — one hundred and twenty-five of the most distinguished men of our land — on Bastille Day. He chose that day as a planned insult to the republican thought bubbling in France. The few left alive he scattered over Russia, over Europe, in order to make them weak by isolation. They are with embassies abroad. The few left here, his spies are trailing for a death just as sure but more secret. Never are they safe! No ruler has worked so busily for the destruction of thinkers.

"While Nicholas is apparently calm upon the surface, he is none too calm underneath. That is why he keeps ordering

Benkendorf to strengthen the Third Section. That is why the number of spies, of secret informers, is being doubled."

The speaker paused. There was a confused murmur. Again it sounded like the sea — threatening, angry. The room now was evidently filled with people. They were arguing about something. Schukowsky could not hear what. A voice that sounded peculiar rang out.

"I want to hear how they died! You saw it — all. Tell us!"

"Yes," in a saddened voice which quieted the room. "I saw it."

Silence followed this.

"But I do not like to recall it. It makes me suffer."

Silence again, sullen, heavy.

Then the same voice, but more insistent, spoke.

"I was away! I have always wanted to know the truth — from an eye-witness."

The man was evidently visioning the past now, and with grief. When at length he did speak, his voice was dull. It was forced.

"Nicholas condemned them — first — to be quartered alive, you know. Then he interviewed them to see if he could make them repent, make them give information about unknown conspirators. Ryleiev — who loved Bestushew-Marlinsky so and had just dedicated a poem to him — told Nicholas he was glad to die, because he believed the seed he had sown would bear fruit for the future.

"'Confess! Repent!' replied the Czar. 'You know I am able to do anything.'

"'That is just the sad part of it,' was the reply. 'You are able to do all good. You do nothing.'

"Not one of them would buy life by repenting. Not one would betray. They were so firm that the faith of Nicholas in himself was all but shaken. He changed the sentence then to hanging. They met death impassible and calm.

"The scaffold was set up opposite the little wooden Church of the Trinity. There near the Neva — on the edge of the Old Petersburg quarter. The streets were filled with people who had come to witness it.

"It was fearful — I can never forget it — the first, subdued,

dull rolling of the muffled drums of the dead. This announced the beginning. Every regiment was forced to be present to witness it.

"At three o'clock in the morning, when the sun swings redly around the Pole to-day, was the time chosen. Night has but three hours in July. At that instant they came — the condemned. They kneeled. Each in front of the regiment to which he had belonged.

"They tore the epaulets from their shoulders first. They broke their swords. They flung them upon the ground. They pulled gray hoods over their shaven heads. From a distance they looked like peaceful monks at prayer. They placed the ropes around their necks unskillfully — on the outside of the gray robes.

"Pestel — who wrote the code of laws — went first. Next came Ryleiev, the poet; then Sergius Mouravieff-Apostol, officer and aristocrat. Pestel's rope slipped. He fell to the ground. He was still alive.

"The watching populace began to weep. They began to cry aloud, and sob. They lifted their hands in prayer. The same accident befell Mouravieff-Apostol, tall, so handsome, young. His hands were tied — poor fellow — when he slipped to the ground breathing — but knowing that he must hang again."

The speaker's voice grew thick with remembered tragedy. He was forced to pause for a moment. When he went on again, it was more slowly.

"'O merciful Christ-Heart!' Mouravieff sobbed. 'The blond day of polar summer, I loved so, is dawning!'

"When they began to hang Ryleiev the second time, he laughed. Think what a spirit he had! What strength was in the man! He shouted in defiance so that every one could hear. He tried to inflame the mob.

"'See what your autocracy is good for! It cannot even hang a man well!'

"But the pitiful, boyish cousin of young Bestushew-Marlinsky was so frightened he could not stand. They had to lift him up. They held him in their arms just like a baby while they tied the rope about his neck. Then they tossed him out to death and the dark.

"When the second time Pestel, Mouravieff-Apostol, and Ryleiev dropped, still they were not dead. Haste was necessary now. The populace was restive. Not much longer could it be controlled. There was fear of an emotional revenge and an uprising of the mob. The soldiers crowded their limp bodies — suffering, alive — into bags. They flung them into the Neva."

A groan was heard — a sound that shuddered. It shocked the listener. It came from Alexis Sergiewitch. The voice went on.

"Nicholas drove out of the city the night before, with every member of his family. He remembered the dangerous moods of the great gray army. As the sun rose upon that fatal day — which did so much to drain Russia of all its thinkers — he was standing alone in the rich, flowering gardens of Czarskoje Selo, which his dry, cold nature could neither see nor love. He was awaiting the word of death — the word which would permit him to breathe freer.

"When it came, he sent back command that he pardoned the three revolting regiments — because he loved to pardon."

A silence so emotional it was felt through the separating doors touched the two occupants of the room. It was broken abruptly by a voice that filled Schukowsky with terror. It was the voice of Alexis Sergiewitch.

"Let us send a joint letter to those who are still alive in the mines of Siberia! A letter that will encourage them. A letter that will console them.

"Here — you at the desk there! Take your pen. Write as I dictate. Put my name to it, too. I want them to know I am not the coward they think me." In a loud voice, every word of which could be heard in the adjoining room, he began to improvise.

"In the depths of the mines of bitter Siberia
Preserve your faith in the midst of your toil!
The mercy of God — my friends — is not yet exhausted.
God sees your suffering. God counts your tears.

"The hour which will revenge the victims is slow in sounding,
But perhaps it will strike with to-morrow's dawn.
You will see us awaiting you — on the edge of the mine,
Erect, ready, you'll find us — with the sword in our hands."

He paused to breathe, to steady himself.

"How do you get into that next room?" inquired Schukowsky.

"This door here — to the left. Then the little dark hall into the long empty room painted gray. Out of that the long hall, down to the half door at the end — which is red."

Schukowsky grabbed hat and coat. He started. In nervous haste he opened door after door in the semi-empty, echoing rent building, in vain attempt to get there quickly.

Alexis Sergiewitch was just preparing to start on the third verse. He was standing in the center of the room, pale, his hair in wild disorder. Schukowsky reached his side. He took him roughly by the arm. Pushkin tried to wrench himself free. He tried to begin again upon his improvisation.

Schukowsky's voice drowned his words.

"He does not know what he is saying. Do not listen to him. For two days he has been drunk. Look at him! Can you not see he is not sober now?"

The pale face of Pushkin began to turn dark. His eyes began to wear the old, uncaring defiance — the look which Schukowsky knew so well. Surprise dazed his hearers.

"Give me the paper — there!" He did not wait for the order to be obeyed. He reached for it. He tore it into bits. The action relieved him. His anger was changing into compassion. His young friend's heart, he knew, was a passion flower that pulsed with the breeze. The ardors of an undisciplined race were in his blood, casting their unstable influences upon him.

Schukowsky began to try to excuse him. "Artists — like him" — he meditated, with quick self-apology for his harshness — "have sympathetic souls. It is merely a developed power to visualize focussed upon life. This was just one of his moods! He did not hold any of them long. They were used only for a moment's wasting."

Alexis Sergiewitch began to estimate the enduring tenderness in the heart of the older man who had protected him, who had saved him so often. One of those painful moments of true seeing touched him. It made his anger fade, but likewise it made him feel helpless.

"Come. My carriage waits in the side street." Pushkin let Schukowsky lead him from the room.

They drove away without speaking — back to the home of Schukowsky, through the disturbingly sweet air of sub-Arctic spring. Inside Schukowsky turned to him sharply.

"You must drop out of sight for a while! If you are not seen and no one speaks of you, this unlucky affair will — I hope — blow over. Then you will be safe again." The face of Schukowsky showed that he was deeply worried. He looked all his years, and sad. In a changed voice, directed by an effort to convince, he spoke.

"Dear little brother, you are running blindly into the web which Benkendorf and Nicholas have spun for you. The only thing that has saved you so far is my personal friendship with Her Majesty, and the fact that Woronzow has assured Nicholas that you are just a social butterfly. But if you keep on doing things like this, neither Woronzow nor I can continue to save you.

"Do not forget that the great gray armies are marching on! Armies take the place of poets now. They are writing the new Odyssey. They can eat up the lives of any number of young men."

Suddenly it was as if an old man that was pitiful and a young man that was helpless began to look out of the eyes of Alexis Sergiewitch. His anger was broken. His emotion was gone.

"You do not comprehend, dear little brother — you of the heart that is merry and good — how terrible is Benkendorf. You cannot measure him. And as for Nicholas — he is orderliness personified. His mind is just like a working housekeeper's account book. Do not get your name written down in it! If you do, when he comes to the letter P, he will begin house-cleaning with you."

Instantly the eyes of Alexis Sergiewitch looked like those of his merry mulatto mother, whom life had never been able to touch.

"Mind your P's!" he chuckled, with a resurgence of the old, bubbling humor.

"Do not offend any one!" with sternness. "Do not get in any one's way!"

"I do not know how to keep out of the way, Vassili Andrejewitch. That is the trouble."

"Remember, Alexis Sergiewitch, that Herzen — safe in England — is writing bitterly of Nicholas. There are Russian presses there. He is besmirching the name of members of the royal family. Nicholas knows it. But he cannot get at Herzen to punish him. But he can get at you! You are a writer — too — and a friend.

"We must be careful — all of us! We must subdue self. Dear little brother — I love so — and pity so — this is the tragic, restless hour just before a dawn of Time. A prodigious — an incalculable — dawn! I want you to live to see it. I want you to greet it — with me. I should be lonely without you," he added softly.

"I'm sorry I trouble you so, Vassili Andrejewitch. I do not know what makes me do the things I do. I do not intend to, Vassili Andrejewitch. And then I do them. When my blood boils, I forget," looking up with the old childish frankness.

Schukowsky's face showed that he was thinking hastily about something. He was planning, and he wished to be undisturbed. Alexis Sergiewitch rolled a cigarette. Then he pulled a little the curtain of the window by which he sat and tried to peer out. After a while Schukowsky's meditation was interrupted sharply by his gay, happy, self-forgetful voice, exclaiming:

"And the spring outside — Schukowsky! So sweet, so alluring! Can you not hear it singing? And women with lovely feet — who are walking to meet it. And I — sitting in here — with all the curtains drawn down tight to conceal me — forced to listen to things about Benkendorf — about Nicholas —"

Schukowsky was obliged to measure afresh the depths of miscomprehension within him.

"I've got to save you — if it can be done — alone — I suppose, just as usual."

"What do you mean? What has happened that is new?" producing carefully a piece of crumpled paper and trying to smooth it out in order to roll another cigarette.

"You are — a genius!"

"Don't call me that again, Vassili Andrejewitch!" pausing in

the rolling of the cigarette. "You called me that once before. I told you then, Vassili Andrejewitch, I did not like it — neglecting important things easily for little things. I beg you not to!" — touched deeply, and grieved. "Am I not a man just like other men?" he questioned reproachfully.

Schukowsky did not have the heart to answer. And he had just decided that the only trustworthy place he could think of to hide him for this unfortunate affair to blow over — where, too, in a way he would be under the protection of Austria and safe from trouble — would be the house of Châli.

"Then treat me like a man, Vassili Andrejewitch."

CHAPTER XI

THE REFUGE

"WHAT's the news?" inquired Alexis Sergiewitch, as Châli entered in the early hours of the morning.

Distributing about her that faint perfume of the Orient that always troubled him, she divested herself of a long trailing wrap of pimento-hued silk, for the waiting hands of the maid who stood beside her.

"Much! — And of the greatest interest."

"You must generously pardon me," he remarked gayly, but with a touch of mockery, "if I say or do things I should not. I do not know exactly how it is proper to treat so fair a jailer."

She turned toward him, indulgence and a trace of merriment within her eyes.

"In the past — in the south — in the old days of my exile I had all kinds of jailers. But never one like you!" He looked at her admiringly. In a white gown that glittered, she stood under the chandelier.

"I think I will take a chance, however, at the proper submissiveness," as he watched the maid disappear into another room. He lifted her hands, first one and then the other. He kissed them gravely.

"How is that? Do you approve?"

"While we dine, I will tell you the news," ignoring his question.

He bowed and waited.

"This is an amusing city of yours, where all the hours of living are upset. Here it is custom for the Court world to dine in the morning."

Sliding, curtained doors of glass disappeared in the wall. Dinner was announced. The dining-room shone, spacious, enticing, before them. He took a seat opposite her. The serving began.

"'The Chase' is ended!"

"*Ah — ha!* You do not mean it!"

"In very truth I do."

"Who won? I am eager to hear."

"Well — this morning Nicholas gave the long-expected interview to the Duke of Wellington and Stratford Canning. He awaited them in the little Blue Room of the Palace — and not in the cabinet. They took this as a good omen. Orlow was there, too, and Tatischtscheff, Minister of War, and Benkendorf. It was Orlow who told me."

"'The Chase,' then, is over!" with delight.

"When Nicholas entered the room where they awaited him, he was humble, profusely apologetic. He kissed Wellington upon both cheeks. He kissed Canning and shook hands with him. He expressed regret that he had been deprived of more intimate companionship during their stay in Peter. That was his loss, however. He knew it. But no one understood how he regretted it. He hoped, however, that they had had some little compensating pleasure during their stay, and that his people had shown them something of Russian life. They, of course, did things differently in Russia, and perhaps not so well. They were young, inexperienced, and needed teaching. Russia had much to learn — much to learn —

"He choked. Then his eyes filled with tears. For a few seconds he seemed unable to speak.

"'Ah — all my happy days are over now — that the crown has been forced upon me! Only Her Majesty understands how I wished to avoid it. But now that I am pledged to Europe — pledged to Russia — to be merciless to conspirators — to keep stable the old civilization — to uphold the law, I will do my duty. For my own pleasure I do nothing. It is duty first.

"'Of course, I can never forget that terrible day of slaughter that was forced upon me in the Square of Saint Isaacs — when the Decembrists were put to death. Duty upheld me. It was allegiance to my God.' He crossed himself.

"They sympathized with him. They assured him that their ruler understood the position in which he had been placed and admired the dignity with which he had met difficulties.

"As Nicholas spoke, Orlow told me he glanced from time to time toward a buhl table at the end of the room. There was a formidable document spread out upon it. There was ink there, too, and seals and pens.

"'The object of our negotiations' — began Stratford Canning as he had begun more than a dozen times during the winter and got no further — 'is to induce Your Majesty to be guided by England — in this affair of the East.'

"Wellington began at once to reinforce Canning by saying that Europe needed peace. 'It has been raked with wars for years. Therefore it is better to leave Turkey, Greece, and Persia, just as they are at present. We know, of course, that the Turks are planning — that is, that they wish — to drive the Greeks out of Europe and into Africa in order to settle Greece all over again with men of Moslem faith. England will agree to protect the Greeks, without disturbing the peace of Turkey. What we want — in fact — is the present *status quo* in the Mediterranean — with the Straits policed by our ships. Turkey under our protectorate, and Greece under the protectorate of Turkey. We will see that your co-religionists do not suffer. We promise that they shall be treated well, and protected with fairness in all their business interests. Their homes shall be safe — and their lives.'"

"The conceited old ass!" broke in Pushkin. "England would rather anything happen than that a European power control the Mediterranean — or the Straits. With England in control, England's road to India and Persia is always open. And she holds a whip over the rest of Europe. What did Nicholas say?"

"Nicholas replied that nothing could give him greater pleasure than to meet the demands of England. Nesselrode then expressed his admiration of England too; and his love for the present sovereign, but he steered clear of an expression upon the subject under discussion."

"The disappearing qualities of old Nesselrode, Châli, when a subject comes up which he does not want to discuss, remind me of the Parthian warriors. Like them he seems to ride away. But, like them, too, he is sending his most stinging arrows back. They never miss — those Parthian arrows of Nesselrode!"

"Then Nesselrode reminded Nicholas of the Treaty of Bucharest."

"*Ah — ha!* It does not take old Nesselrode long to have the Iron Duke dizzy."

"'That's just it, Your Grace,' declared Nicholas. 'We could meet all your demands — and speedily. And my heart longs to do so — because of my personal love for both you and your sovereign — if the Turks had not broken the Treaty of Bucharest. It would be undignified — Your Grace will agree — if not impossible for the Czar of Russia to confer with rebelling dependents — who had broken a treaty. A treaty — as Your Grace knows — is something holy. It is the highest law of nations. Therefore it is my duty to my God to uphold its sacredness.'"

"Nicholas — you see — in his heart, hates England. He is incensed because she is permitting his rebellious subjects — such as Herzen — to set up revolutionary presses there," explained Pushkin. "From England they are permitted to send their literature abroad."

"Yes," replied Châli, "and like Prince Metternich he is displeased at her foreign policy as it has been managed by Canning. Neither does he approve of her liberty of spirit. He is mad, too, at the memory that England refused — peremptorily — to make an immense loan to his brother Alexander, at the outbreak of the Napoleonic wars. His pride, his conceit, are continually offended that that small pin-point dot of an island should meddle in Eastern affairs which belong by right — he thinks — to him. He knows, too, that England keeps the mountain tribes in rebellion. He knows England is paying money to incite Persia. Greece is peopled by his co-religionists. Greece ought to belong to Russia. In addition, there is India — England's objective.

"'Then,' remarked Nesselrode diffidently, as if asking for pardon for being alive — 'there is the policy of Alexander.' Here Nesselrode crossed himself."

"No one knows better than Old Nesselrode, Châli, how to ward off envy by feigning humility. He has measured — and therefore he fears — what is in the human heart."

"'Your Grace' — tears blurred the eyes of Nicholas — 'I am

pledged to the memory of my sainted brother. You know he considered it his duty to punish the Turks for insulting the Orthodox Faith.' He crossed himself. He murmured a prayer.

"'But — it is the will of England!'

"'I admire England,' was the reply. 'I cannot tell you how greatly. Her soldiers have policed the world, and her flag has made safe the seas,' he began. Then Nesselrode praised England just as Nicholas had done. The Iron Duke and Canning believed now that they had convinced him and had everything their own way. The one little sentence of theirs — 'But it is the will of England' — had in their opinion settled it. Orlow said you could not describe the look of relief that crept over the faces of Wellington and Canning after all these weary months of waiting — and the prolonged strain they had been under — at the words of praise and sympathy from Nicholas and his powerful Chancellor. They felt they had won.

"Then they boldly set about gaining the assent of Nicholas and his Minister to some minor points of diplomacy, thinking the great point settled, that the papers would be drawn up and signed — which Wellington was to take back to his sovereign — and they could set out. In addition, they would have the credit of having performed well their mission. Upon Wellington's honors upon the battle-field, diplomatic honors would now be heaped."

"Think of the months they have been kept here idle, Châli!"

"Judging by the momentary attitude of weakening on the part of Nicholas and Nesselrode — thinking how they could have everything just as they wished it, because Nicholas was afraid of England — they placed all their cards upon the table — face upward. Ah — how Prince Metternich will enjoy this when I write it to him to-morrow!

"They began to make Nicholas suspicious of France. They told him France wanted to make an Orleans Prince King of Greece; and the Greek Isles. England was opposed to this for various reasons. She did not want the Greek Isles made into a sovereign, independent entity like England. There is only one other great sovereign island-nation, and that is Japan. One is enough. England does not want Pozzo di Borgo made Russian

Minister to Paris. England would prefer there a less able man and one who loved England instead of France.

"Then Wellington and Canning swung the conversation around to the amount of revenue which Greece should pay yearly to Turkey. They placed it at an impossible figure. Then they wanted Turkey to control with them — alone — the Straits. They thought, too, since peace is the aim at heart, that it would be better for Russia to stop increasing the war footing of her great gray armies — because it would impoverish the rest of Europe to keep up — and bring about an increasingly unstable economic basis.

"They grew more bold, more dictatorial. They thought Russia dared not oppose them, Orlow explained. They increased, they elaborated the demands of their country. Orlow thinks they have both been uncomfortable at the expressions of wealth, of power, they have seen in Peter. Wellington is terrified at the great gray army. And that amazing royal ball — where I met you again — all but took his breath away. There he saw a world prostrate at the feet of Russia. It has troubled him.

"Orlow told me he had seen him observing enviously the picturesque mounted guard of the Emperor; the Circassians, the Cossacks — some dressed like warriors of the Middle Age — sitting upon priceless Eastern rugs, carrying swords whose blades are arabesqued in gold with prayers from the Koran. The palaces of the nobles, too, with their enormous rooms, their treasures, their profusion of flowers from all the world, has made him fearful. It makes him think Russia will be competing in the Continental arena for world-domination."

"They have been playing a pretty comedy here this winter — those two pig-headed Englishmen! Tricked, deceived at every turn. And all the time Nicholas was arguing with them with apparent sincerity, he knew the soldiers of the great gray army were marching on," observed Pushkin.

"Then — Orlow declared — Wellington began a pompous oration to close the deal — so to speak — and quickly. He declared that technically Russia was enjoying peace with other nations. It was flourishing financially. It was high time for him

to return to England and for Stratford Canning to take up his neglected duties in Constantinople. He hoped the documents could be signed which would promise peace to the world — and pleasure to the English sovereign.

"Nicholas replied that nothing could give him greater pleasure. He wished to state that in speaking just now His Grace had voiced his own thoughts better than he could voice them himself, because His Grace was older, celebrated, and long versed in the ways of diplomacy. He regretted his own lack of practice in that noble profession.

"He declared that the speech of Wellington made his heart glad, because no one loved peace as he loved it."

"Why are you laughing?" inquired Pushkin quickly. He was surprised at sudden merriment upon the face of her who was usually grave.

"Orlow told me that right at that moment the face of old Nesselrode resembled night on the Neva."

"How?"

"He said it was something sweet — far-away looking — and deceptively reflecting."

Pushkin laughed aloud.

"You see, Châli, old Nesselrode is afraid of peace just now. It would give men too much time to think about his personally conducted affairs. They are more safely engaged in killing each other. With their heads either shot off or busy in planning how to keep them from being shot off — they cannot plot, they cannot interfere with him — Nesselrode. An army in action takes up the minds of people! It is a kind of universal theater — conducted by kings — with a free ticket for every one. First for this world — and then for the next!"

"Keep still. Listen!

"'It grieves me, dear friends, not to be able to meet your wishes,' Nicholas replied to the pompous speech of Wellington. Imagine — will you — their surprise!

"'I cannot tell you how deeply it grieves me — so greatly do I honor and admire you — and the land you represent. My personal inclinations lead me to say: I will do anything you wish.

Honor alone restrains me. Honor and duty. I am bound — you see — by the Treaty of Bucharest — which the Turks have broken — to punish Turkey. I am pledged likewise by the fact that on our Coronation Day, Persia violated the boundary line. Likewise, shortly before my sainted brother left, Tiflis was invaded and burned. Above my own will I am pledged to follow the course of my brother. God grant peace unto his soul! I must keep faith with the dead.

"'I am, however — I cannot explain to you how glad to say so — I am, however, able to agree with you about an Orleans Prince being made President of Greece. The management of Greek affairs belongs to me. I shall make Capo d'Istria — whose ability you cannot doubt — President of the Seven Islands Republic. We need another island empire!

"'And our good friend — whom likewise you admire — Count Pozzo di Borgo will be Russian Ambassador to France. They — very likely — will accompany Your Grace and Mr. Canning — upon your journey. I heard Your Grace say — did I not? — that Your Grace leaves to-day or to-morrow. My heart grieves — as will all Peter — to lose Your Grace! We have learned to love you.'"

"*Oh! Oh!*" chuckled Pushkin across the table, under the warning of a lifted finger to wait until she had finished.

"'Will Your Grace and Mr. Canning be good enough to look at this document?' making the slightest possible gesture in the direction of the buhl table at the end of the Blue Room.

"The Minister of War immediately became alive and hastened to the table. Nesselrode did the same. As Wellington walked along it was difficult to know whether his anger or his surprise were greater. He was beginning to feel that he had been made a fool of. He was shocked that in the heart of this young ruler there was no well-grounded respect for his opinion. He suddenly glimpsed — but still dimly, because the words had been so fair — that Nicholas had no intention of relinquishing his own ambition for the East. He cared not a whit what England might think about anything.

"The fat-bellied Minister of War, Tatischtscheff, and Nessel-

rode were bending over the table. They were calling the guests' attention to two documents spread out upon it. They read. They could not believe their own eyes.

"What do you suppose those documents were?"

"How could I know?"

"They were declarations of war against Turkey — against Persia."

"'Your Majesty! This cannot be!' exclaimed Wellington, aghast. 'We have waited here all this winter to take back with us the articles of peace. Count Nesselrode, your Chancellor, gave us to understand that peace was what Your Majesty wanted."

"'Your Grace, you divine me perfectly. Peace is what I do want.'

"'What, then, do these documents mean?'

"'They are merely to convince Your Grace that I am a martyr to duty.'

"'We have been tricked!' exclaimed in anger the Irish Canning.

"'The tenderness of His Majesty's heart, Mr. Canning! The fact — Your Grace — that His Majesty so loved the company of Your Grace — he could not bear to say the word that meant separation. His Majesty — Your Grace — is only a boy with a too-loving heart.' Old Nesselrode had found his tongue.

"'But — Your Majesty — surely Your Majesty will not sign!' exclaimed the two men with something that resembled despair in their voices — despair in their faces.

"'That is why I brought Your Grace and Mr. Canning here — to be present when I sign them. The pen — good Tatischtscheff!' He dipped it in the ink. He bowed. He presented it.

"'Your Majesty — you cannot surely sign! It means enveloping a quarter of the earth in flame, in bloodshed. It means the death of countless men — *Your Majesty* —'

"'I agree, Your Grace, with your noble sentiments. There are tears in my heart. I am a martyr to duty.' He bent his superb figure. He signed."

"You see, Châli, Wellington has a type of mind that can neither understand nor deal with the Slav. And Stratford Canning has been more or less dazed all winter. The two together are no

match — diplomatically — for either Nesselrode or Nicholas. Nicholas brushed them both aside just as he would a fly upon his coat."

"Come!" — flinging up her little hands with a gesture of joy that he should follow. "Let us take a look at this strange white-night of your polar spring I have heard so much about, which is now bending over your city. And then to sleep! I need sleep. I am weary."

He followed the white, swaying figure with the long train sparkling with silver embroidery, over to the window in the front of the drawing-room. She flung it open. They leaned out side by side in the silence. Above their heads was the sweet, silver transparency of the season which has no night, where one has the fancy that it is possible to see far, far into the mystic heart of space. But close to the ground a mist was spreading. It rose higher and higher. Peter was beginning to look like a vast sea of milk, with bright domes rising out of it. The silence of sleep was deep everywhere.

"Through this blue-white, opaque world, I suppose Stratford Canning and the Iron Duke are driving angrily away to tell England war is declared."

"Yes. And when they arrive and get a chance to tell it — Russia will be on the road to victory."

"They are slowly turning over in their English minds, probably, all the subversive ideas they have heard projected here. It will probably occur to them," added Pushkin, "that there is a marked racial difference between Russians and other Europeans."

She leaned out farther and farther, the better to inhale the sweet late night. She drew it joyously into her lungs.

"The tide is turning!" she announced abruptly.

"How do you know?"

"That freshening air. Can you not feel it? Do you know the scent it brings?" she questioned eagerly.

"No. Do you?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Syringa! White syringa — like the eyes of love in the night."

CHAPTER XII

THE REFUGE

THE next night while Châli was going from palace to palace in the last dizzy whirl of the licentious city's gay life, before the swift summer exodus to distant country estates in the interior or by the Gulf of Finland began, Schukowsky dropped in to chat awhile with Alexis Sergiewitch.

He was glad to find that his erratic young friend was calmer — more reasonable now — and enjoying one of his few fortunate moods of self-control.

"Alexis Sergiewitch, it was your dropping out of sight the way you did — as I advised! In the close of the Court season, the consequent confusion — and the amusement — the gossip over the trick played upon Wellington and Canning — those wild words of yours — if they happen to have been repeated — may be lost sight of entirely. I cannot tell you how I worried for the first few days."

He bent his long, sharp-elbowed arms awkwardly, and began to search through his pockets. At length he produced a letter. He unfolded it carefully. He held it up for Alexis Sergiewitch to recognize the writing and the paper.

"From Bestushew-Marlinsky?"

Schukowsky nodded.

"I suppose he is dueling, drinking, making love — tossing off novels — talking recklessly; in short, living as only he can."

"Griboiedov is there!"

"Ah — is he?"

"Listen. This — his letter — will tell you best." Schukowsky began to read:

Griboiedov is here — but he is so tragically sad. He thinks only of the things at home he has lost. He cannot adjust himself. He cannot yield and give up. Homesickness is becoming a disease that is consuming him. I should not be surprised if it killed him. He cannot eat. And

he will not speak. He sits for hours in silence like one distraught. I wish he would write and forget, or else make love — as I do. They are pretexts, to be sure, and I know it. But they are happy pretexts. They are the proper pretexts for youth.

Paskievich cares nothing about his moods. They dislike each other. They are unsympathetic. Neither has the slightest respect for the kind of man the other is. And yet they are held together by the Emperor's command. I predict, however, that Paskievich will go far in the military world.

The little soldiers coming south so fast are pitiful. They die daily. Death is tragic in this lonely land. The gaunt mountains accentuate its terror — lifting above me as they do the black forms of destiny and doom. Here death is devoid of tinsel decoration. It becomes stark, grim, terrible.

I am learning, all over again, what loneliness is. You would be amazed at this life of mine, I suppose, if you could see it. You would reprove me! Yet you will believe me when I tell you it is only to help me forget. A man must forget — you know — in his own way. You are the only one I know, Schukowsky, with whose personal nobility justice to others is mingled.

In this loneliness — which makes me suffer so — you would either laugh or weep to hear me telling over and over the rosary of the lovely objects of the past my eyes remember. All the army provides us with is death and drill.

There is a broken marble — from Greece — in my father's palace, there in Peter. It represents the body of a woman; armless, legless, — yet delicate and impetuous. But the memory satisfies my thirst for beauty — the memory of this mutilated, lovely body which the touch of centuries has turned to amber, to satin.

I think I have given up life — in a way. Better, perhaps, it would be to say — I have renounced it with my mind. I have given up the thought of owning any of the rare objects I love. I am giving away every little trinket. For myself — I want nothing. All that I can hope to have is the developed knowledge of beauty in my brain — and its indestructible love within my heart. Possession I leave to others.

How is Alexis Sergiewitch? Tell him not to bemoan his lot! Tell him to do as you say unless he wants to live as I do! What would that Sybarite do in this center of war and death? His — like mine — is a poet's head; and therefore mostly wrong. Sometimes I cannot help wondering what has become of my old self — the self of those foolish, happy days before the Conspiracy. Where do our old selves go?

When Schukowsky finished reading, the face of Alexis Sergiewitch showed that the message from his old companion had struck home. He was sober, more thoughtful.

"Be grateful for the protecting Providence that has saved your life and freedom, up to now!" admonished Schukowsky, as he picked up his hat and made ready to go, against Pushkin's pleading for him to stay.

"I'm looking in upon several other friends to-night! Goodbye."

Châli did not return at the usual hour. Pushkin dined alone. He had only his thoughts for company and the memory of the sad letter of Bestushew-Marlinsky, from far-away Caucasia — and the war. He meditated a little over the strange, the capricious stars that preside over the destiny of poets. But the meditation was not particularly enlivening, so he dismissed it.

When Châli entered, it was with an unrestrained gesture of gayety, of relief.

"I paid my parting *devoirs* to-night. All of them! I said goodbye to the great world of the Petersburg season. I have been driving from hostess to hostess as wildly as the Iron Duke and Canning when 'The Chase' was at its hottest," she announced. "I am glad it is over!"

"Where did you dine?"

"With Princess Woronzow. She is leaving on the morrow for the south. She is going to open the Oriental palace the Prince has been so long building on the coast of Crimea."

The candles, the chandeliers were extinguished. The warm wind lifted graciously and then billowed the white transparent curtains. The sweet souls of night-flowers came in upon the wind. They drew their chairs up in front of the drawing-room window to smoke awhile together, to chat, before day began again for the noisy work-a-day world which did not spend its nights in pleasure and its days in sleep.

"Tell me about everybody!"

"I suppose that is part of my duty as jailer, is it not? Well, to begin with —" lighting first a long, slender cigarette. "Your fat

Krylov was there! I saw his hands tremble when he first looked at the piled-up sweets in the dining-room."

"He is a great glutton," laughed Alexis Sergiewitch.

"Fine eyes, though — for a fable-writer — are his," she continued — "the kind that can see fairies dancing under the moon — but nothing much that is real — or of the present. I must not forget this. Young Metternich spoke of you! He likes you. He longs to see you again. Do you know I felt while I was talking with him that he guesses where you are? He has the uncanny, the super-normal penetration of those who are death-stricken. He looked very ill. His eyes were dull, purple pansies the rain falls on. He goes to-morrow, too.

"Capo d'Istria and Pozzo di Borgo got me alone at Bagration's. I did not intend for them to do it! They outgeneraled me. They subjected me to a terrific grilling. They suspect — I feel sure — that you are in hiding here. It worries me — for you. They would tell if they knew. I cannot explain to you how greatly I fear them. But they leave at once! I am glad of that. It is a great relief to me! Di Borgo goes to Paris to be Russian Ambassador. Capo d'Istria goes first to Vienna, to procure the Austrian Emperor's support — in making him President of the Seven Islands Republic in the Ægean. I shall breathe freer knowing my enemies are gone. Ah — the mental acuteness of those two adventurers! I know how to estimate it!

"Once, too, I saw Benkendorf — cold, petty, contemptible. A dangerous man, Alexis Sergiewitch!"

Pushkin was not interested in Benkendorf. He was ugly to look at. And he was uninteresting. His mind reverted immediately to Di Borgo and Capo d'Istria. "What if they should tell Metternich — their suspicions?" he ventured.

"They will not!" she replied. "They want his favor too badly. They will please Metternich."

"What are the others doing?"

"Well — Princess Bagration is yielding to the suit of Odojewsky — more by weariness and indifference, I think, than anything else — as the quickest way to be rid of him. I saw Baratinsky — in several places — wandering about lonesome and dissatisfied,

trying to control his thirst for something he cannot find. He is terribly upset — he told me — because he does not dare buy any foreign books to read now — since the prohibition of Nicholas. He does not even dare have any in his possession.

"Your old friend Prince Viazemsky — I should judge by that slash of scorn across his lip — has given up looking for pleasure of any kind. Instead he forms fine and bitter phrases to fit the weaknesses, the indiscretions, of other people.

"The face of La Ferronhays, the French Ambassador, interests me, Alexis Sergiewitch. It is what I should call the diplomatic face — subtle, but weary, from looking too long upon all deceptions.

"Old Nesselrode delights me. In my years of wandering I have found few to compare with him. He really loves the world he deceives and fools so easily. His dim blue eyes show it."

"How's the Princess?"

"Woronzow — you mean?"

"Yes!"

"She is more than happy. Caucasus is far. The Prince is so noble that he is deaf to gossip."

"Galitzin — of the magnificent shoulders and blond hair?"

"Oh! she consoled herself long ago. She has forgotten the black and sullen eyes of Paskievich. A lot of those middle-class people — pushing in everywhere now — were in evidence. Commonplace people — trying to make of themselves a social force."

"I hate those upstarts!" he replied.

"Razumowsky — Alexis Sergiewitch — is a most fascinating figure — old as he is! I wish I had known him in his youth. His eyes are sad, dull — and they never smile. To-night he was a gem carved out of ebony and ivory. Prince Metternich told me that that new palace of his in Vienna is more sumptuous than the Austrian Emperor's.

"Yes! I caught glimpse of Nicholas. Did you know he is corseted so tightly that he faints sometimes when they unwind his officer's sash? As usual, he looked cold, remote. Old Bobrinsky, his relative, was with him. The fat old man was swaddled in blue satin and lace. He was as happily garrulous as a monkey in a

tropic forest. But the kindness, the tenderness, of Nicholas toward the old man is praiseworthy!

"Yes, yes! Her Majesty was present — at Princess Woronzow's, I mean. Her Majesty is the thinnest woman I ever saw. She has given heirs too rapidly to Russia."

"She tries, Châli, to live up to the uncomfortable sense of duty of Nicholas. Imagine getting up in the cold blackness of an Arctic winter — in the middle of the night — to be ready for parade at dawn!"

"Really! Is that true?"

"What of the army, Châli?"

"For some reason no human being can guess," she replied in a puzzled voice, "Paskievich has not supplanted Yermolow yet as Commander-in-Chief of the forces of the south. And Nicholas sent him with the signed documents to do it!"

"What do you think is the reason, Châli?"

"No one knows! They are two brave men. It may be that they are able to estimate and admire each other. All that South Russian world, they tell me, owes its development to Yermolow and Woronzow."

"That's a fact!"

"They are great leaders — Yermolow and Paskievich. And they are incomparable tacticians."

"But Paskievich will eventually supplant him — Châli!"

"Probably — because Nicholas wishes it. The Emperor fears Yermolow, because Yermolow loves not ambition, but his fellowmen. He does not fear Paskievich the same way. Paskievich loves gold, fame — and women. Paskievich — you see — has weaknesses. Therefore Nicholas is able to look down upon him — and love him."

"Paskievich — Châli — would give up much for a night of love!"

"Prince Metternich," she replied reminiscently, "declares that no one can tell what it will take to move a man — what hidden — perhaps unimportant thing — unresponsive to reason. As an illustration he gave that intimate friend of his — Gentz. You know how fond he has always been of him? He insists that Gentz

would trade the Strassburg Cathedral any day for a fine piece of chocolate.

"Oh, yes! — the Grand Duke was out, of course. He was parading his love of the big words he does not understand. Yes — the Petersburg smart set was out in force! I never saw a society I enjoyed watching so! Do you know what they are like to me?"

"What are they?"

"Gay toy balloons — whose cord connecting them with the earth is cut. That is — they are merely showy, with no sense of direction. Your climate is partly at fault, I am beginning to think, Alexis Sergiewitch. It is just as destructive to morals as the tropics where I have lived. It surpasses just enough the healthful northern line." She lighted another cigarette. Then she recalled acutely the face of Orlow — the longing in his eyes when she refused to let him drive her home. Aloud she remarked:

"Orlow was in the country early to-day. He drove in just in time to dine with us at Princess Woronzow's. He hates so to dine alone in his palace! He says every road now is filled with caravans. They are carrying all those different kaleidoscopic people from that amazing royal ball, where first I met you again, away from Petersburg, and back to their homes.

"The highways of Russia now are peopled as thickly as the cities. At night the levels show burning camp-fires where they cook. The fields of earth are bright as the starry heavens. The plains resound to the tongues of Babel. Flags of every nation are displayed. It seems to be a veritable migration of nations. Nowhere in the wastes could one be lonely now. Continually — through the camps and the crowds — Orlow explained to me — gallop the soldiers of the great gray army."

"Like mounted, swiftly invisible death, Châli, moving on and on!"

"A truce to your melancholy! It is because you have been alone too long. Look out upon this marvelous polar night of summer that enfolds your city and touches it with magic. It is the prolonged sweetness of a twilight that cannot die.

"My tragic poet — my impenitent prisoner," patting his rebellious curls in the wind while the scent of flowers in the night

caressed them. "Perhaps this — this outside here — is earth's brief — and only — immortality."

"Like Paskievich," he retorted, laughing — but with a touch of scorn — "I would trade immortality for a night of love!"

She wondered wearily why Orlow, the nobleman, talked poetry to her, and swept her into the rhythm of its fineness, its tenderness, while Pushkin, who was a poet — and a genuine one — laughed, talked nonsense, or else showed a savage wit.

CHAPTER XIII

THE REFUGE

THE sound of the carriage wheels of Châli had scarcely died away when Schukowsky came in. His kind, old face was sad and worried. He was distrait and evidently considerably upset.

"Vassili Andrejewitch, what is the matter? Are Benkendorf and the police after me? You are as terrified as if you had come to warn me."

"No, dear little brother, Alexis Sergiewitch, praise be to God!" crossing himself reverently. But there was something arresting in his voice.

"What is it, then?"

"Bestushew-Marlinsky."

"Is he dead?"

"No —"

"Sent to the mines again? Come over here by the window. Sit down awhile — calm yourself and then you can tell me." He arranged a chair. He brought him a cigar. Then he lifted a long, silver candlestick — the only light burning in the room which the white night lighted — brought it and held it tenderly for the older man to catch a light from it.

"The noble heart of you, Vassili Andrejewitch!" he exclaimed sensitively as he took the candle back to a corner table where it was sheltered from the wind.

After they had smoked awhile in silence, facing the somewhat sad, silver, phantom daylight outside, Schukowsky turned to his young friend, grief upon his face.

"A letter, Alexis Sergiewitch, came to-day from an officer in Derbend — the officer is a friend and companion of Bestushew-Marlinsky. It seems a crowd of young noblemen and recently commissioned officers had just arrived in the train of the great gray army. Paskievich gave them a banquet before their distribution by him to various other subsidiary posts to which he is

sending them for the war. Paskievich is bitter-hearted — you know — and revengeful because he was snatched away from an incipient love affair here, just when he was promising himself a good time in the city after his prolonged hardships — deprivations of the things of the senses — in the camp.

"You remember that first letter, Alexis Sergiewitch, which I read you from Bestushew-Marlinsky — a long time ago — about his little blonde, childish sweetheart — do you not?"

"Yes, yes — of course! Go on."

"Well — it seems that love has helped to make him happy, poor fellow. It has consoled him — in a way. Paskievich observed it enviously. It is the sort of thing that would arouse him. At the banquet that night, Paskievich told the table all about it — and scornfully. He made it the subject of dinner discussion. He told them — when they had all had more champagne than they could carry — about the little blonde love of Marlinsky. Her name, it seems, is Oline Nesterzoff. Her beauty was extolled; her grace, her childish charm; her devotion to her lover. Paskievich did not like to hear this.

"Then some of the young bloods from Peter told Marlinsky they would bet they could cut him out. Paskievich saw the dangerous turn the conversation had taken. He was glad of it, and he urged it on.

"Bestushew-Marlinsky was not drunk like the others. You know he never did drink to excess — to lose himself. He admitted his love gravely — with a sort of dignity that impressed his hearers. He said he was glad of it — that he was going to stand by it — that he was not the man to run away from the woman he adored. Paskievich took this as a reflection from a subordinate officer — upon himself. This angered Paskievich — who had drunk too much. He was jealous anyway. He envied him. And he hates all writers — it does not matter who they are. Bestushew-Marlinsky was arrogant — relying upon the inherited memory of his great social position at home — which was superior to that of the family of Paskievich.

"Paskievich suggested a bet — a large sum of money — upon the honor of the little blonde sweetheart of Marlinsky. The rest

of the young bloods agreed uproariously. They flung the money — then — noisily upon the board. Bestushew-Marlinsky got up and left the crowd. He retired to his room.

"Relieved of his presence, and spurred on by Paskievich, they laid a wager to prove to Marlinsky that his sweetheart was untrue to him. The next morning this was told to Marlinsky by one of his friends. He snapped his fingers at them.

"'She loves me — for myself alone,'" he declared proudly. 'See the proof of it! What could I give her? — here in this wilderness — nothing but my love! You cannot prove her false. I defy you.'

"They spied upon her — after that — it seems, for days. But they could find nothing against her. Time was getting short. War and the bugles were calling. Duty was pressing. The duty to Nicholas could not be delayed. Paskievich was angry and impatient. So he told them to make up — quickly — a story, and show to Marlinsky the false, the forged proof of her guilt. He chose the best-looking of the young nobles from Peter for the man. You know how wild, how high his temper is — Marlinsky's — Alexis Sergiewitch — do you not? Well — they did it — the scoundrels. Bestushew-Marlinsky was beside himself with grief — with shame — with rage. Paskievich was delighted. It satisfied his own hunger of the heart — a little, you see — to watch him.

"A few days afterward, Oline Nesterzoff — as usual — went to Marlinsky's room. A half-hour later a shot was heard. Marlinsky ran out like a madman — crying for help — praying to his God — calling for the army doctor.

"When they went into the room to see what was the matter, Oline Nesterzoff lay upon the floor — dying — from the effect of a gunshot wound. The priest was summoned. When he administered the last rites of the Church, she swore upon the cross when she kissed it, and upon the blessed body of the Merciful, that she had been cleaning Marlinsky's pistol — and shot herself by accident. The priest wrote down her dying testament. The young officer who had played the trick — ashamed now — witnessed the document. This alone kept Paskievich from sending

Marlinsky at once to the mines forever — which is death. The dying girl's love saved him.

"This has made a tremendous impression upon Marlinsky — that in the agony of death she thought only of him. Now Marlinsky wants to die too. He is seeking death now daily in battle, Alexis Sergiewitch, while you live here safely — with one of the loveliest women of Europe — and in luxury. The strange part about it is the bullets will not hit him. Like the Wandering Jew death is not for him. He dashes into the thickest of the fight. He rides through the bullets as safely as through a snowstorm. He leads a charmed life. He plays with them — he laughs at them — and he goes unscathed. Paskievich is ashamed. He is belittled by his daring. Daily he faces death and he does not care. He is the wonder, the amazement of the army of the south. No one ever saw such bravery before. It makes Paskievich feel contemptible. He has given up writing now. He seeks only death."

Schukowsky's voice had grown thicker and thicker. He could not go on. Silence fell between them heavy and sad.

Then Schukowsky began to fumble feebly through all his pockets, with the awkward, forgetful gestures Alexis Sergiewitch knew so well. After a time he pulled out a sheet of wrinkled paper. He smoothed it with trembling hands.

"Marlinsky," he explained, "wrote this to me. Only two lines. I never expect to hear from him again. He knows — I suppose — that his friend told me the story. I will bring you the candle. I want you to read it yourself. From it — dear little brother — learn to be wise — and thankful."

Alexis Sergiewitch took the thin sheet from the hand that trembled. He read:

"*I am carving a rose upon her tomb — and her ineffaceable memory upon my heart.*"

Wordless now they sat by the window — unable to talk — in the silver night.

When Schukowsky left, Alexis Sergiewitch continued to sit on there — grieved — dazed with the cruelty of existence. Then he longed for the quick antidote — the only one he knew how to

procure for himself, swinging true to the impulses of his nature. He longed for love — to make him forget — he longed for its deep moments of oblivion — and caressing arms, to put an end to this torture of the mind which he could not endure.

The summer night concerts on the Neva — where one drifts idly in a gondola, and listens to music — close at three o'clock. Châli came in, projecting before her that perfume which seemed instantly to fling far the present, and to wrap about Pushkin the habits of another race.

"My prisoner looks like a penitent to-night! Has Schukowsky been here?"

"Yes," dully.

"News?"

"Yes."

"Bad?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"The great gray army — in the south . . ."

"Some friend of yours?"

He nodded his head. Then — evasively — because the other grief was too great to touch, he explained that the young poet Polyaeff was killed almost as soon as he reached the south.

He watched her take off her hat — her wrap — and hand them to the maid. He liked the queer dress she wore to-night — which was not a dress at all, but yards and yards of a scarf wound about her after a manner he did not understand. He speculated pleasurably — because it offered panacea to his feelings — about her instinct for self-made draperies of uncut silk. He had admired and wondered before at the sumptuous, semi-careless swinging about herself of Eastern weaves; splashed muslins of Gwalior; gauzes — beaded and embroidered — the haunting, quick eloquence, in short, of the *imprévue*.

She lighted her cigarette, and sat down beside him, sympathetic, silent, meeting instantly his mood. As he observed her — so near he could touch her — it occurred to him that there was something almost too freighted with memory, with meaning, in the moments of repose of this woman of an Eastern people. Too

full of shadows — perhaps — of inexpressible enrichments. But how gracious to him now was her presence! How consoling!

He leaned forward. He lighted a fresh cigarette slowly from hers, meeting her eyes as he did so.

"I could write books to your eloquent eyes of the East!" The mocking merriment in his voice to-night was gone, registering her difference from Russian women. He noticed that her uncorseted body was suppler than the bodies of women of Europe. He felt on the moment that there was a deeper, richer consciousness within her, because it was embodied spiritually in a greater past.

In a little quick, wayward, caressing gesture of his hand which followed, she thought there was something impersonal and ancient, a touch of that which was imperishable of an elder world. It brought back to her certain episodes of her youth. Then she remembered — acutely — her roof-top at night — in Africa — her roof looking out upon the desert. In the man beside her there were the ardors of the black races. And he, too, was tawny — and pallid — and colored like the desert sand.

He put down his cigarette. He took away her cigarette a little imperiously and placed it carefully beside his own. The two flames met and mingled. He held her two hands in his. He bent his face down to them and held it there — as if to assuage his soul.

"Play for me to-night, won't you? Play me something — far away — that will make me forget — shut out thought. Lift me out of myself. Improvise for me —"

There was mingled terror and grief in his voice. Obediently — feeling his need — she arose. She went to a remote corner of the drawing-room where she kept her violin. There in the dimness she remained, and played to him. The first, high, dominating vibration shut out the present which is something the genuine artist cannot look at long nor endure.

In the music there was something as if his flesh remembered in some fabulous long ago. It was as old as Karnak and its monstrous beauty — her music — and just as disconcerting. It was something created for the æsthetic needs of a people for whom modern morality had not been made. Ah — the blessed relief! With his

face buried in his hands, while the night wind lifted his pale curls, he visioned the burning silence of the African day; the first glimpse there of that marvelous, that brilliant blue, when one opens one's eyes — which is the sky of Africa; the rare, sweet beginning over again of life after sleep in the lands of Islam — when over draped forms, prostrate in prayer, the first light leaps. He saw mysterious cities — cities which have kept for centuries their secrets — like the sea. Forgotten cities — most of them — by the edge of deserts — cities whose amazing silence only the ripple of prayer is permitted to break; where the almond tree blooms in the spring and the nights of summer have a voluptuous allure that nothing can equal.

The last note of the first improvised memory faded.

"*L'Afrique!*" he exclaimed understandingly, but regretfully. "Magnificent land of light — of heat — where the forces abound that make life! Oh, that I could have been there with you — to know the sweet limpidity of its sky — in the old cities of the north — the Roman cities — where passion has wings amid the potent memories of Roman pride! How magnificent must love be — by the blue shores of the Mediterranean — and night . . ."

As he talked she estimated the dreams, the visions, that swept in futile splendor across his brain. What a waster he was! He smoked and drank and related merrily in words his visions for the moment's enjoyment — or dreamed them alone for the voluptuousness of prolonging pleasure of the body by will across the brain — and did not trouble to write them. It aroused her pity — and a peculiar, a sad comprehension. She feared for him. He threw away — and either did not know or did not care to value — what duller men could not gather in a lifetime.

"There are days I shall remember forever — in that land of light," she answered him — "and the dizzy moons too — when night came — and they dipped above the red desert."

By proxy, he began to live prodigiously — freed from fear, from persecution, from grief, lifted, by her music, to a temporary height of power and clarity. She registered the vibrant life within him — the intense virility — such as could be born only under a tropical sun.

She put away her violin. She arose and came toward him as if to say good-night. She was struck instantly by the look in his eyes as he arose and confronted her, but he did not speak. His face was furrowed and tragic. She became aware of that fatal, physical magnetism which few could resist. She felt it laming her will. She felt it pouring over her nerves its stupefying insistence. His arms circled her. With something that resembled the grieved relief of a child he hid his face on her shoulder. It stimulated him as he stood there holding her in his arms in the dimness — to think that men had loved her. He knew, too, that they had been princely men. She had known their kisses. But the gray-whiteness of her shoulders was softer than satin — and richly hued like himself. Deep within her eyes he had read comprehensions — sympathies — that were dear to him; he had sensed qualities that satisfied the thirst within himself. Surely somewhere, within the countless complex cycles of the past, the blood of them had met and harmonized. This monster of passion — who was constantly overstepping law and conventions — who had no stable place in life — she, the Eastern woman, could understand. He was to her like the gorgeous, giant petaled blooms of the land where she was born — which she loved, and longed for still.

"If this life — the safe life — here with you, Châli — could last forever. I can't tell you how it frightens me to think that it must end." It was a sob. He did not speak soon again.

Then a voice so savage, so dulled it shook her — shook her free from memory and reason, and dominated, and was all but indistinguishable, was murmuring in her ear, "*Mon amour! Mon amour!*"

CHAPTER XIV

A WEEK OF LOVE

Two days later they rolled away, at four in the morning, in an old-fashioned heavy *britschka* which made Pushkin double up with forgetful laughter when he first looked at it. They were going for a week in the country, to an isolated estate whose loan had been procured for them by Schukowsky. At the end of the week Châli was to go on to Vienna for an important conference with Prince Metternich, and Alexis Sergiewitch was to proceed to Moscow, and later from there to Mikhailovsky.

This was part of Schukowsky's perfected plan to keep him out of sight — and likewise out of Peter — as long as possible. The moment was critical, since young men were being sent in such numbers to the great gray army — and the various seats of war. If he were out of sight, since he had not had military training and was not an officer, he might be passed over and forgotten in the general confusion and excitement.

Alexis Sergiewitch was looking his merriest. He was enjoying his hastily borrowed, disguising clothes. He wore a large plaid traveling coat, with a bunglesome, upturned collar, that partly concealed his face and wholly concealed his slenderness. A high-crowned straw hat — likewise borrowed — sat jauntily on the top of his curls. His blue-gray eyes were animated and mocking. His too long teeth flashed as he talked. Châli realized somewhat sadly — the instant she saw him — that with him life was merely one gay and hasty improvisation after the other. They rolled southward in the usual rapid Russian manner.

Around them spread the superb opulence of beginning summer. The acacia, the dwarf cherry, were in bloom. They looked at them delightedly. They exclaimed at the sight. The poplar was just beginning to throw off a fragrance which was the soul of bitter winter distilled in sweetness. There were wild apple trees too. There were white thorn and silver birches and hazel bushes.

He pointed them out one after the other. He named them to her. The enchanting spring of the open country received them. It was sweet with yellow sunlight across broad levels. Their senses expanded responsively to its influence, as warmth opens the rose. They began to live as if this period of delight could never end. They felt about them in the free and unencumbered spaces that glorious forgiveness of nature — as gracious, as gratifying, as forgiveness of the spirit — which is summer on the wing.

Summer was waving toward them gallantly her blossomings, her coquetry of leaves. Little warm winds, shy now from the sad exile of winter, caressed them. Birds caroled over their heads. They were free. They were in hiding from their acquaintances. The world and its demands were shut out.

In the fields, where — on their arrival — they wandered hand in hand, they plucked violets, blue and sweet as the skies above them, while a breeze grown tender was blowing upon them its bubble of blossoms. The lure — the light of spring, of love — for them who were untrammeled, for whom there were no inhibitions, living mentally as they both did, in the late, free, flung-back glow of the fleeting eighteenth century, when man — for a time — was man again.

Alone in the night together, out in the fresh, flower-dotted fields, where they wandered and tried to get lost, was just like being alone together on some unvisited, strange landscape of the moon, that owned — in the usual sense — neither day nor night, and where time stood still for them. It was just as lonely, just as far away.

Bareheaded, like a couple of children, they observed with delight above them the pale opal radiance of polar night, which is so supremely lovely. They watched the range of pastel tints sweep across the heavens, resembling the slow but continual blooming and fading of gigantic flowers.

They watched the flashes of heat lightning on the distant horizon. Then they listened carefully, with their heads close together, to find out if they could hear a storm wind whisper in the distant valleys. But all that they succeeded in hearing was the calling to them of the wind of spring, sweet with its rakish

promise of love, the quick birth of little flowers, the good-night call of mating birds.

"It is just as if a new God declared: 'Let there be light!'" Pushkin exclaimed, the frolicsome wind playing with his hair.

Châli thought as she listened to him — in the freedom and happiness of the fields — that he was a magnificent instrument of flesh to register and record passing emotions.

"Why do you not write all this?" she inquired.

"I write," he replied in sudden scorn, "only for the days when I can no longer love!"

The last night of their week of freedom came. It rained — unluckily. The fields could not be theirs to-night. The rain was ploughing long furrows among the bending grasses. It was flicking the slim poplars with a flying fringe of cold crystal beads.

"Play for me! I am the jailer now instead of you. So, you see, it is my place to command."

Obediently she bent to pick up the violin. She tested it. He thought as he waited patiently that it was impossible to tell what gift of thought her presence, her music, would bring. It was impossible to know where it would transport him, what unguessed door of resplendent visions she would fling open.

She recalled landscapes she had seen, faces that had passed before her — in going about from place to place in years of travel. She could hand them on to him through the most alluring of mediums — tone.

Her presence enlarged the boundaries of vision and comprehension. Her presence suggested vast landscapes where she had lived, but which he had not seen and perhaps could never see. Fascinating cities of Islam flashed their fervor upon him.

Now, as he bent by her shoulder to beg the gift of her music, he sensed swiftly the loveliness of historic palaces through which she had passed. Centered upon her was the distilled richness of renowned cities, proud and Eastern civilizations. Her presence made him live intensely.

As she played, he was able to eternalize — instantly — her melodic memories in words.

Across the shabbily furnished, small, dim, country room —

which the weird, unreal midnight with its phantom light, was penetrating — floated powerful vibrations. They were memory. They were life expanding dominatingly in tone.

But over Pushkin to-night — because to-morrow meant farewell, and he did not know for how long, and he was never able to say good-bye easily to anything that pleased him — her music swept, at first, with the waves of regret. It disorganized more completely than usual his grasp upon the present. He felt that it shut out hope for him because the horizons it conjured into being were so vast, so varied, and so unreachable. And because he might never be free.

Then he tried to thrust the depression from him because he could not put up easily with unpleasantness of any kind. He began to live by proxy that perilous, unwise, intense life of the brain, which consumes energy and makes other living seem cheap and not worth while.

She projected her past upon him. He could feel the burning wind of the Syrian desert which she had crossed. He heard the sad, chaotic resonance of the sea. He floated above time and space.

Slowly — on muleback — he began to file along the narrow footways of mountains. He scaled heights that looked down into gorges — across which again gray mountains rose — through air that glittered. He saw diminutive, wet, green valleys, where wise-eyed daisies swung in the wind, and the pear trees blossomed. He saw old cities of sun-dried clay — bitter with light — surrounding mosques bluer than a Himalayan turquoise — neglected cities of the lonely highways of Persia; cities of peace, of prayer — but seldom of progress — cities of the people of her faith.

Sweetly he learned strange facts. He learned — sensitively — that the silence of Asia is accompanied by tinkle of water and moaning of doves. He learned that these are the ancient pleasures by the desert's rim. He grew homesick for the lands of light he had never seen.

It occurred to him — fleetingly, desirably — that they two could go away together, and there — in her East — be free. She was thinking something like this, too. Then she thought — with

a trace of regret — that it would not be easy for him to wish anything permanently — not even love. She wondered — futilely — if it would be possible for him to plan, to work logically for an end, however desirable. He was only an artist she sensed more sadly this time as her bow swept on. Even if he were a great one, he could understand and cling only to the passing moment. Only that which was perishable and exquisite could touch him.

"Ah — to what heights she can lift me!" he was exulting. "*Painted Asia!*" That was the phrase. "*Painted Asia*" — where the possibilities of pleasure widen so perceptibly. This he owed to her.

The rain ceased with her playing. She put the violin away. They stepped outside into the fresh, glistening silence. Moved by realization that the morrow meant the end of the week, moved by the dim, spreading loneliness of the fields, the mating chirrup of a disturbed bird in its soft shelter of leaves, they planned a future together, a future which should be far from Russia and its turbulent life — freedom — when the conference with Prince Metternich should be over, and they could meet again in Peter.

After this decision had been reached, they stood awhile in silence, folded in each other's arms. Then they went softly indoors, up the creaking, wooden stairs, to a long, bare room that resembled a loft, through whose open windows crept the disturbing fragrance of the fields.

"I am greater as a poet than ever — here beside you — in the still night . . ."

CHAPTER XV

THE BAN OF BENKENDORF

While Châli was wheeling rapidly away toward Vienna for the delayed meeting with Prince Metternich, Alexis Sergiewitch was on his way to the family residence in Moscow. He reached there just a few days before they closed the town house. He was forced to set out again, this time with the family, for Mikhailovsky. They had barely time to unpack, to settle down to the usual dull routine upon a lonely country estate, when the old, upsetting quarrels began. His father was irritable because the season forced him out of the city. The country bored him. He hated it. His frivolous mother missed her round of balls, of *soirées*.

Fresh from the happy week of love with Châli, fresh from the restful charm of the days they had spent in the fields, he observed the family at first with detachment, and less quick irritation. He saw that each one had sharp, individual views, that excluded the others. Each believed that he alone was right. The times had something to do with it. It was not so much the personal fault of each that they quarreled continually. Russia was forging ahead so rapidly that a man of sixty and a man of thirty could not comprehend each other. There was no common mental meeting-ground for them. They were as unlike as if they had been reared upon different planets.

He considered the things that his father liked to talk about. He had no interest in them, and it was not pleasant for him to listen. Life was harder for every one to live now because of changing standards. His dissipated, lazy, braggart father spent his days in voluptuous memories, or in drinking, gambling, trying on new clothes. He was an old *roué*. He was not ashamed of the useless life he had led, he, for whom reality could not now suffice, and was rapidly passing. All that he knew how to do was ride to hounds, read French romances, see that his wardrobe was in

style, and tell over his old love conquests. These were the catalogued amusements of a gentleman.

His lovely, indifferent, mulatto mother watched the two mockingly. She hoped that they would have an occasional brisk sparring match of words for the upkeep of her irrepressible merriment. She saw — because she was possessed of a good mind — that her son was too out of the ordinary to inspire love even in the members of his own family. She knew that he was lonely. But that was his affair. It did not concern her. She laughed, and she did not care. The penetration of her mental operations usually satisfied her. She understood that he possessed the purely Russian impulse to live fully, believing with careless indifference — and disinclined to probe the subject — that life's exploiting is worth the price. She held the same opinion. It was his habit — she knew — to pay without calculating.

After the last irritating interview in Peter which the old man had broken off in such a rage, his father had occasionally turned the subject over in his mind. He could not deny himself anything for his son. That would be out of the question. Therefore there was only one sensible thing for the son to do; give up writing and marry a rich girl who had a title. Then he would lead the usual life of a country landowner on a great estate. That, too, of course, might be the first step toward political or legal preferment. The old gossiper told off on his five fat fingers the girls who seemed most eligible.

He presented the subject to Alexis Sergiewitch. He refused, and not with too much consideration for his father's feelings.

"First you ask of me wholesale sacrifice. Next you plan out a long life of martyrdom."

"Nothing of the kind! Have you any money? There is just one way to get it. Marry for it! That is what men of your class are in the habit of doing."

The idea of Pushkin, married, sedate, and a possible lawmaker was too much for the sense of humor of his mother. Her eyes became scornful, mocking and merry. She did not take any part in the conversation, because that would have been too much effort. Besides, she always had so many purely personal things which

she liked better to think about. Alexis Sergiewitch did not know how to pretend to yield. And he would not sacrifice.

The quarrels increased daily, after this, in violence and in length. They began to affect his health. His nerves were trembling. They were feverish. That restless malady of discontent, which fastens upon men of talent and destroys them, began to touch him. Sad, confused, feeling that the arguments with his father had been worse than vain, because they had resulted in anger, he packed up and rushed back to Peter.

But in Peter he could not find the happiness he had counted upon, nor the friendly, easy intercourse. Something was lacking which he could not get hold of. People were different. To be sure, nothing could please the society of Peter long; fickle, sated with luxury, spoiled children of Time. And it had been circulated that the Court Set disapproved of him.

He tried to live just as in his youth, when he made his boyish début, and had been intoxicated with applause. But something hindered him. It was not he who had changed. He could not tell what it was. He was hampered by something invisible, but powerful, something pervading like the fog.

In that sudden return to Peter — at the time of the Emperor's Ball — he was born to a new life whose difficulties and dangers he did not see. Now that the comic-opera crowd of gorgeously dressed, picturesque visitors from the four corners of creation had left, Petersburg had shrunken, and things purely Russian began to count again.

He recalled the events of the winter. At that astonishing royal ball, when he met his intimate friends again and spoke to them, he remembered that they did not seem to hear when he first spoke — save Schukowsky. And when they could not avoid hearing, they had been eager to get away. At the moment he had not paid attention to it. But he thought of it now. Most of his pleasant conversation during the winter had been with foreign visitors, he reflected. At Nesselrode's *petit souper* — after the foreign guests left the table — he felt as if walls of ice dropped between him and his old friends. That evening he had felt so neglected that he left early and alone. At Count Orlow's he would have been refused

admittance had it not been for Viazemsky. He had been puzzled and grieved at the time.

Agony began to expand, to crystallize around the clear perception that his friends were snubbing him. He was in a world of people he knew, in the most talkative of cities, and yet he was alone. If the doorkeeper at the mansion of a friend let him in by accident, the instant he crossed the threshold he was met by words like these:

"Sorry. By Saint Vladimir! — In five minutes I go for an appointment with my doctor."

Or, the next acquaintance would say:

"On the way to my dentist! Come another day."

"Appointment with my banker. It is to arrange a loan for a friend. If it were for myself, I would not go. Come soon — again!"

He knew perfectly well that the next time he would not be let in.

His presence upon a fashionable promenade revealed his acquaintances busy with tricks to avoid greeting him. They adjusted an eyeglass. They straightened a hat. They fastened carefully a glove. They turned suddenly to observe some one who had passed. Daily the ban against him was put upon more doors.

If he boldly overrode their disinclination to recognize him, if he tried to find out what was wrong, and asked for an explanation, they apologized profusely. They assured him of undying friendship. They could not understand how it happened. They thought, perhaps, he was mistaken, or else exercising in life his poet's fancy. The last was the flinging of a pepper-filled sweetmeat. But the next time they met him they snubbed him worse than ever.

If he walked up to a group of acquaintances — or to a card table in a club room — none of them looked up. None knew that he was there. Their icy exterior offered no footing for conversation. The same impulse struck them.

Upon the Nevsky Prospect, by the summer island-restaurants, at the night concerts on the Neva, his acquaintances were looking

at each other, or else in an opposite direction. They could not see him. Their faces did not betray consciousness of his existence.

New people whom he forced to speak in public places were uncomfortable. They were vowing they would not be caught this way again. They were watching for an excuse to get away. He was ashamed to detain them. He was too proud. He was no pensioner upon men's mercy! He sensed painfully that they feared they were lessening their social standing, the respect in which the Court Set held them.

Occasionally an individual, wishing to curry favor with the others, would fling a rude word at him, a carelessly veiled insult. The answer that came back with dazzling readiness would be annihilating in its wit. It would humble the offender. The listeners laughed. But the triumph was only the triumph of a moment. Pushkin must pay — and a hundred fold.

When he met Prince Viazemsky — the useful, protecting friend of the old days — they did not understand each other. Viazemsky had changed. Pushkin felt sensitively that Viazemsky did not like to have him frequent his palace. At the same time he knew that Viazemsky's nature was too fine to injure, however much he might disapprove. Probably — in a money pinch — he would not refuse his help. This was fresh humiliation. They had been developing in different directions. Viazemsky, of course, possessed too superior an intellect to stoop to ignoble slight or shabby meanness. But the old bonds of sympathetic liking which had meant happiness were broken. They met. They talked. But Viazemsky seemed drier-hearted.

There were some, too, who were afraid of this man of terrible tongue, of word-juggling magic. Some envied him because they felt that the needs of his soul were superb. Some envied him because of the charm of his personality, and the supple elegance of his body. He did not live always mentally in the same place, as many of them did. He was whirling on and on. The light that enveloped him was dizzy, brilliant, changing.

How well he was learning to recognize the look of hatred that came creeping into men's eyes, and then slipped over softly into sly, cowardly concealment! He watched it come, he watched it

go, with a fascination from which he could not turn away, especially if they had been dazzled by his laughter, by his cruel wit. This hatred increased when they found that he did not enjoy his own brilliancy or even know it. They agreed then that he was a fool.

Alexis Sergiewitch in his first youth had supposed that the heart of the world was kind, generous, tender, like his own tender poet's heart in youth. What he found to be the truth in his mature, suddenly awakened manhood was so different, it made him suffer. Besides, he belonged by right of birth to the upper class which had been in the habit of demanding of the lower a certain amount of adulation.

Life spread before his awakened, disillusioned seeing, a sad and alien country, where he must learn over again. There were new laws. There were new customs. This learning was a source of discomfort. And he was acquiring some of that desolating vision into the hearts of men with which Alexander had been born. Alexander was accustomed to it, and could more easily get on with it. It was destructive to Pushkin.

In the hearts of his acquaintances — with one or two exceptions — there was envy, the desire to injure. And he longed boyishly for their playful merriment just as of old. A vast, a crushing destruction was creeping slowly toward him. Its cause was compounded of many complex personal motives. But it was impelled by imperial will.

The firm earth, so to speak, upon which people in general are permitted to stand with a certain amount of security, had been taken away from beneath his feet. He was paralleling Alexander, in that simple, human things could not easily be his and last. Like Alexander, he was beginning to lose *cette puissance de bonheur* which Napoleon had declared man may not lose and live. He had the same nervous belief that people were making fun of him. They were alike, too, because they were contradictory, changeable, and well-nigh impossible to judge, exhibiting a lack of logic in action. The desires of both were poet's desires, but confronted necessarily as they both were with life, which is prose, they suffered, and their reactions were tremendous. In certain

personal experiences, in the emotional deductions they made, they were alike.

Pushkin possessed just what Alexander had possessed: charm, grace, instead of power and control. Alexander was unable to get over the sad carnage of the Napoleonic wars. Pushkin could not banish from his mind the putting to death of the Decembrists. Alexander was the first person of imperial birth whom a changing civilization began to touch perilously. Pushkin was the last great poet of the world caught by a mischance of destiny in a period in which he did not belong, a period that was turning toward the domination of things scientific.

The world in Pushkin's day was for the first time beginning to look with a combination of displeasure and disdain upon the great personality, the significant individual, which was what the eighteenth century had featured. The ego of the masses was becoming now so inflamed, so swollen by the first touch of soft living, by undreamed-of material luxuries (indoor warmth, good clothes, rich and sufficient food), that it could not tolerate superiority of any kind. The impulse of the age toward the general leveling was being felt sharply in every land, together with the wholesale destruction of the old ideals. The change of attitude toward the dominant personality by the heretofore humble but now upcrawling masses was so great that Pushkin met enmity where one generation before he would have met adulation. He was a brilliant fag end of an important political period, that was finishing, and on the threshold of another period in which a poet would be of less account than the man who pickles pork successfully. The age of prodigious personality was ending.

He belonged in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. By accident of destiny he had stumbled on into the nineteenth century, a period — peculiarly enough — when the powers that were his were first falling into disuse. He stood unsteadily upon the point of time where two opposing forces of civilization — focussing tragically in transition — met. The world was changing rapidly. Certain finenesses, certain brands of ancient honor, were gone already. Life was in revolt against the past, which meant merely that it was a more easily observable point of evolution.

Pushkin's life, his physical body, were trying to bridge the chasm between the old aristocratic idea which reached perfection in Versailles and the world that came afterward. His upbringing, his heart, were with one; his reason, the developed powers of his brain, were with the other.

Pushkin felt a dim foreshadowing within him of the ugly, the rapidly approaching new modern world, with its more commercially minded citizens, who can neither respect nor love anything fine, anything noble — anything superior to themselves. These citizens — some of whom Nicholas was admitting socially because he was forced to do so — were serviceable for increasing material development. He, however, had been brought up to believe that a shop-keeper was on a level with a servant, because both existed merely for the convenience of the noble. They were not made to associate with. For this perplexing combination he felt disdain. But already the proud past was fading away from before his longing eyes. That lovely, that desirable thing he was looking at was a receding civilization.

Despite the Autocrat's diligence the safe life of the landed estate owner was breaking up. Under the repeated shocks of war which Nicholas was carrying from Europe into Asia, the Continent, where his ancestors had led the luxurious, merry, idle lives of the upper class, was crumbling. Certain relied-upon facts, former conditions, were no longer static. Something different — which he probably would not like — was on the wing.

The spiritual in its broadest acceptation — including the catalogued interests of mind — was weakening. Only judgments based upon material worth, material efficiency, prevailed. The new, manifold, powerful, upspringing activities which he saw everywhere were, of their own force, more and more ruling him out.

Now there was a bourgeois, a commercial attitude of mind, whose petty, reliable, domestic background would be durable, hard-woven horsehair instead of romantic, richly hued tapestry of Beauvais. Life was merely responding rapidly to new demands. Poetry was being rewritten in unequivocating but vigorous prose.

Under Nicholas the dangerous class of the superfluous was

coming into being, a class which would reach its limit of expanding in 1848.

Pushkin was beginning to feel like a foreigner in Peter. Perhaps he was of the past, too, all save his art, and he belonged to the unassimilable race of emotionalists in a land of contrasts, where for the commonplace conditions were confused.

There was an increase of egotism among insignificant people, among the middle class, resulting from conditions of living improving so rapidly. This helped crack the social structure. This made it uneven. No one was willing to remain in his place. Each overstated his ability as to where he belonged. The Golden Age of the Commonplace was dawning. Mind was becoming less brilliant. Social limits being removed slightly — by the necessity Nicholas saw of creating the *bourgeois notable* — the masses desired to rush to the long-envied height of the noble. Alone, the genius-like Pushkin was humble — made so by the vastness of his vision.

A different kind of egotism — frequently comic — was being born. It was egotism gone mad. Poets, and men of trained thinking power, were beginning to be looked down upon. A poor man with a new coat upon his back saw in himself a Dante, an Angelo. Who can estimate the power of a coat upon a back that has not worn one! The old, humble, just power of estimating, which fear of God in the heart had put in an earlier generation, was no more. The minds of commonplace men were as out of focus — judged by a former standard — as the mind of Pushkin. But they were many. He was one. Strength may be multiplied wrong.

In this social-mushroom agglomeration brought about by Nicholas, Pushkin beheld a world of men who were mad about gain because its ultimate possibilities (for the untitled, the base-born) had just been revealed. Multiplication of rubles could make a peasant equal a prince. A world, dominated by material acquirement, would lift the man of the masses to the plane of the noble. It was the beginning of a new tragedy — a world busy selling its soul.

During the first half of the nineteenth century humanity was occupied in adjusting itself to these conditions. The mind of man

was learning how to get on in a new climate; to take the good, to get along with or to avoid the evil. There was sad miscomprehension. There was material and social instability. Forces were busy creating the new, discarding the old. In short, Time — that gigantic serpent — was changing skin.

The ill-will which he saw everywhere directed toward him filled him with fear. It was a nightmare of the day. It confronted him everywhere. It destroyed his peace of mind. If he could only get away from Russia!

All about him he sensed enemies. All about him he sensed hands stretched out to push him to destruction. He could not fight them all. No one could do that. He watched himself being shoved daily toward a destiny he could not escape. He glimpsed once in a while now the difference between the world of mind he lived in and the world of harsh fact that other people lived in.

Châli did not return. She kept writing vaguely of a long, an unaccountable delay which she could not take time then to explain. Schukowsky was away with the Imperial Family in Czarskoje Selo where he was superintending the education of the children. A good many of his boyhood friends were gone. Some were dead — hanged, that fatal Bastille day in July. Some were in exile. Some were following the great gray armies. He was conscious of an emptiness, a reproachful silence. Too many of his merry companions had paid to Nicholas the price of their dreams. The censorship was so strict it was difficult to publish anything. The summer, with its daylight nights, irritated him by keeping him without sufficient sleep. He was restless and out of sorts. Nothing satisfied him. His face was beginning to be marked by passion. It was more eloquent, perhaps, but it was pale and tragic. The unexpiated wisdom of suffering was beginning to look out of it.

He thought of marrying sometimes. . . . And he thought continually of Châli. Schukowsky, before he went away to the country with the Imperial Family, had urged him to marry. Then the wild nights which were endangering his health would be over, and his great gift would have a chance to blossom.

He began to see that passion was getting the upper hand. It was dominating him just as drink dominates men. Neither his

body nor his brain could withstand it. He thought sometimes, too, now, of the peace of that Monastery of Solovetz, with which the family used to threaten him. It held no terrors now. He began to read religious books. He longed to find himself equal to the supreme renunciation when the life of the soul triumphs forever over the life of the body. But he was not great enough spiritually. He was not brave enough to suffer.

He read sacred books. He read "The Imitation." He pored over the prophetic pages of the Bible. He dreamed of the life of a monk which used to frighten him; he dreamed of its unvexed calm, its shelter from the storms of the senses. He longed for its prolonged peace where the emotions must cease their playing. He was swinging mentally between dangerous extremes.

At the foot of shining crosses, in the silence of the dim cathedrals he knelt for hours and prayed: "Save me from this hell of passion in which I am sinking to ruin! I am not strong enough to resist its dangerous nepenthe. Save me!"

But between the words of his murmured prayers — which he tried diligently to make devout as the prayers of Alexander had been, and penitential — the untamable influences of his nature came to trouble him. The past rose up. It mocked him. He saw between the gemmed, the painted faces of the saints upon the icons, the old, wild, rose-flushed dawns amid the lofty Caucasian mountains, filling him with terror, with exultation. He saw the level outspread steppe by Ismail in spring. He thought of those nights of love. How great was his regret for them, even now! Confused, discouraged, he ran away to Mikhailovsky!

I come back here again where once I lived
Two solitary, monk-like, silent years.

And I, obedient to Nature's laws,
I, too, have changed. Yet here anew I feel
The old days' charm and dream them back again.
But yesterday it seemed I wandered through
The wood. The lonely house stands there where
With my nurse I dwelled. The good old woman
Lives no more. No more I hear the morning

Round of her slow heavy feet, and hear no more,
On black wild nights of storm, her fairy tales
That soothed my heart and charmed me back to joy.

Dear groves of Mikhailovsky, when I first
Found rest beneath your shadows, I was young;
Careless and eager I looked out on life.
Now you receive me back a wanderer
Already wearied with the stress of days.
Unequal is the strife twixt fate and me.
Embittered is my heart; and now I think
Of those fair, youthful days — and then — think too
Of cruel things, of punishments deserved,
Of trials that are nameless; then of love —
Of love which I have squandered; then—remorse.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MARCH OF THE GREAT GRAY ARMIES

SILENT, swift as cloud shadows, the great gray armies of Russia went slipping across the plains. From Orenberg — in the East; the Cossack country; from Lomonossow's lonely little fishing hamlet by the edge of the Arctic Ocean; from Alexander's place of penitence in the Siberian waste; from the farmland, and the mountain and the steppe, they went.

In the Government buildings of Peter grave-faced officials with huge maps covered with dots, covered with glass-topped pins, pegged away patiently at plans. Niggardly Nicholas — who forgot nothing — pulled out from the cases in which they were kept the dim and faded war-charts which his father, Paul the First, and Napoleon had made for the conquest of India.

That huge, cruel human spider, Nicholas, spun and spun: vast webs which he spread over the south, the east, the west; vast webs made up of the gray lines of his armies; webs of perishable human lives, for whose destruction he cared not a whit, because it was he who performed the divine will.

In almost every home there was sorrow which was not permitted to express itself. Sorrow was commanded to dance, to play cards, to wave fans of joy, to listen ecstatically at the opera. He would kill off the old. The young would have new minds, different minds, and, best of all, no memories.

The little soldier — about to die — saluted for the first and the last time, with his wondering eyes, according to the place where he had been born, and the place to which he was going, the Volga where it makes that noble curve between Stavrópol and Syzrán; the falls of the Dnieper; the well-nigh measureless immensity of the slow-flowing Lena; or the Yenisei, emerging from polar fens to cross the treeless tundra. He left, perhaps, an Arctic fishing village to enjoy himself within the colorful, coastal cities of the Crimea; he feasted his eyes upon the fertile tobacco fields of

Bessarabia; or the rapidly developing towns of Caucasia, piled about with pyramids of white, fragrant pine timber. His awed, his childish eyes, were so overcome with vastness, with novelty, he forgot that the end of the journey was death.

He glimpsed at a distance, in passing, the fabulous central cities of the Muscovite; cities colored apple-green, sullen red, the blue of faith, and enlivened with touches of gold borrowed from Byzantium.

He saw Moscow below the Sparrow Hills; Peter — a pallid Venice — upon islands; Kief the Holy; the ancient, high, hill-situated cities of the south and west. His eyes looked upon mountains so lofty they filled him with terror — mountains with the shadows of great eagles upon them. His pitiful, dull, uncomprehending eyes confronted spaces which only an undiscovered future would be able to fill with people — and a new and a different life.

He saw the Zaporogian Cossacks. He saw the slant-eyed Tartars of the south and east. He saw the time-blackened, bullet-battered Turkish fortress of Ismail. He saw the level battle-grounds of the Ackermann Steppe where Potemkin the Reveler died, and grumbling Suvarow won renown.

They died — the pitiful little soldiers: from prodigious physical effort; from lack of shelter, care, food, and inclement weather. Nothing was done for bodily comfort; to ease their suffering or prolong their health. To combat the terrors of the wounded they upheld before their eyes in death the wonder-working Virgin of Vladimir.

They toiled through snow-filled passes. They swam ice-fed mountain streams. They choked with thirst upon the Turko-Arabian Desert. They breathed the too thin, too dry air of the height. They wilted under the sun of the south. Diseases that kill masses — typhus, cholera — raged. They died together patiently — peasant and prince.

From that vast map spreading over so great a part of the earth's surface, with its tiny, fly-speck dots which represented cities, soldiers were going — going . . . toward the south . . . toward the south . . .

Strange words, names of unpronounceable geographical places, crept into polite Petersburg talk. Events which meant the death of thousands merely emphasized the lifting of a lace kerchief, the wave of a fan. Words vibrated upon the perfumed air, which to the sweet lips speaking them meant merely glory for Russia. The death of countless men decorated a phrase. Seldom has life been held more cheaply. A world was restless — fearful of the future — planning in desperation for war.

The united battle-cries of Christian and Moslem shrilled above the piled-up dead. Ancient, dreaming Asia, archaic Asia of the silent rose garden and the tinkling camel caravan, met chaotically this young, impossible giant — Nicholas — rambling awkwardly down from the night of the Pole who had awakened with surprise to mingled knowledge of East and West, and who did not know what were his duties nor how great were his powers.

Upon the plains where Biblical armies had met and mediæval Crusaders had sought out the way, where before races biologically impelled had rushed upon each other, the bugles called. But now the East could not hold its own. The greater material development of the West had put a fatal weight into the scales.

The Prince Royal of Persia rushed proudly from his capital city. He rode commandingly — and to conquer — at the head of forty thousand picked men — well-fed, well-clothed, and fresh. Paskievich met them. He not only defeated them easily, but he all but utterly destroyed them, with only ten thousand Russians, weary, footsore, ill-fed. Almost none were left to ride back. A vast battle, never adequately mapped out in a European tongue nor exploited historically, began to roll from the boundaries of Moldavia and Bessarabia to the shores of the Tigris and the Euphrates.

The eyes of fog-bound England were drunk with gold, drunk with the glory of the East. She was pouring power into Persia's treasury for war against Russia. She was urging her on for the sake of India. So out of the West they crept, like gnomes from cold, Teutonic forest depths, drawn on and on by the gleam of gold, by the lure of color — of delight. Greedily England fought. She was inciting Turkey to war, although her own battle-

ships were forced to appear against her. India — the world's desire! The eyes of Russia turned here. And France. And Austria. And Italy. Germany was sullen, envious and grumbling. The Netherlands were fearing for their Asiatic colonies — their vast financial schemes in Malay land.

Wildly adventurous novels — tragic and dramatic poems in other tongues — keep safely to-day these tales of prowess, these feats of valor.

A great period of literature inspired by national life and political changes, a great period of war and hero romances, began, continued a few years, and then ended.

This followed the march of the great gray armies.

Deeds of bravery, of dramatic heroism, were performed in the deep-cleft mountain valleys of Caucasia, and upon its light-swept, lofty tablelands; deeds related in prose and verse — in difficult and exotic tongues — that take their place, by right of importance, with tales of the age of chivalry, and with the old romances of the battle-fields of France, Spain, Italy, the Low Countries.

That fiery-hearted Pole, Adam Mickiewicz, related some of these stories in verse in just such romances as Scott was writing in England, only he was more powerful, more eloquent than Scott. He had published "Sonnets from the Crimea," and his lengthy epic, "Konrad Wallenrod." Masterpieces which hold high place in world-literature were to follow in succession. In this hothouse forcing atmosphere of war and suffering, heightened emotional activity, prodigious commercial and material expansion, Polish romanticism began, reached its height, and died. In periods of revolution, of vast social change and economic upheaval, poets are born. Their days are as decorative — as brightly useless — as a rose floating upon a torrent. A poet is Nature's most splendid extravagance.

The romanticism of Poland was the last stronghold in Europe of the mental outlook of the Middle Age to fall. Geographically speaking, Poland was the boundary line between East and West, where the ways of thinking of the old days met quickest the

harshly innovating present. Here the descendants of princely families, who had learned their manners in the palaces of France, clung pitifully to the past in the breaking-up of the estates of the Magnates, in the too quick cutting-over into a petty, shabby, shop-keeping modern world. Powerful novels in Poland — which is where the long novel originated — pictured passionately now the proud life that was passing. These novels were written by such men as Kraszweski, as Joseph Korzeniowski. They mirror the changing age. They attempt to show vast, outspreading, culture-epochs.

The march of the great gray armies, however, was doing just what Nicholas did not want done. It was battering down the safe past which he longed to uphold and perpetuate.

Count Krasínski, the Pole, who wrote anonymously or else under a pseudonym, and who felt an inclination to be known as the prophetic poet of the future, put out books whose contents savored of the East, little known races but recently exploited, a different world of mind and ideals. Influenced by what he had seen on a visit to Petersburg, and what he had heard while he was there, he created a peculiar, an engaging masterpiece, which he called: "The Comedy Which Is Not Divine." Count Tarnowski wrote an interesting, explanatory introduction to it in order to tell the reader that it pictured "*The vast social battle which is going on now throughout all Europe — but whose culmination the future must wait to see.*"

This followed the march of the great gray armies.

The epic poem was born again. The hexameter of Greece unfolded in the tongue of the Slav.

In Serbia, Karagjič started a renaissance. He responded immediately to the let-in sunlight of world-mind that followed the triumphs of the great gray armies.

In Bohemia, Jan Kollár influenced the public mind with song. He wrote powerful poems. Frans Celakovský's responsive cry was — "The Daughter of the Slava." In Bohemia, too, Karel Mácha imitated Byron.

Among the South Slavs, Frans Prešeren, with increased self-respect, measured racial power afresh in song.

Among the Croats, Ivan Mažuranič wrote "The Death of Gengis-Aga." In Hungary — a different race, but a space of land allied geographically — Vorosmarty uplifted in epic song the Magyar tongue. He wrote "The Flight of Zalan," which in the guise of a distant age was trying to show the soul of the expanding present.

For a period, in the tongue of the Croat, the Czech, the Bulgar, the Magyar, the Slovene, deeds inspired by the march of the great gray armies went echoing in prose and verse. Masterpieces were built up out of words, prodigious in length, in account of recorded deeds, in eloquent relating — an unread literature, wherein Europe has greatly undervalued the creative brain of the Slav, and which when another century had passed Western Europe and the twin Americas still would not know. These deeds — unheralded in Western Europe — were building a loftier barrier of dissimilar thought, ideals, dissimilar interests, in the between Europe and Asia spaces. During the time of the onward marching of the great gray armies, the most brilliant creative minds of the Continent could have been observed in action. The curve of the crest of mind balanced the curve of the crest of war.

Baratinsky was finishing his verse novel, "The Gipsy Woman," which pictures the condition of the restless upper classes. Pushkin had finished his masterpiece "Onégin." He had written "The Avaricious Knight," "Don Juan," "Pultava." The period of his long verse-romances was drawing to a close. Schukowsky was translating the poets of the Continent. Prince Viazemsky was turning from verse to writing letters and arranging witty, scornful notes about the proud figures of Petersburg.

In Caucasia, Bestushew-Marlinsky had written brilliant novels of the war, of the handsome mountain people, and the life he saw about him. Young poets like Polyaeff sang pitifully and died. Griboiedov — whose pitiful eyes had looked out of a sad face upon His Majesty's amazing ball, who hated sham and loved the truth — was miserable and homesick in Persia, which sullen

Paskievich had subdued. Here, all but dying of loneliness — after writing that noble fragment which was his picture of Grusinia — he was murdered at the mad season of the feasts of Moslem faith. Baron Delvig, poet and friend of Pushkin, had died in Peter. Other writers had fled to France, Germany, England, never to return. Among gifted men, Pushkin alone remained.

The most splendid, basic, unexplored material in existence, for the heroic war romance, the resounding epic, was here. Greece in the old days did not surpass it. More men of genius were engaged actively in fighting than ever at one time before. This between Europe and Asia mountain-land was a weltering glory of brains and blood, a never-to-be-forgotten cataclysm of power and genius — a glorious sunset of Time, dyed red and gold. These men — many of them — were talented swordsmen, horsemen, poets, painters, goldsmiths. They were musicians, princes, nobles, statesmen. Each was equipped to lead a dozen lives. Forgotten and helpless — squandering the splendor of their souls — in the depthless mountain valleys of Caucasia, when East and West — at the command of Nicholas — rushed destructively upon each other — they died.

This followed the march of the great gray armies.

Romantically voracious Dumas *père*, alone among Western Europeans, was first to sense this superb material and then take it over for his country. He rewrote Bestushew-Marlinsky for greedy Paris. Sometimes, after that, he borrowed from him and then forgot to tell. But forgiveness is a duty toward one who is so delightful.

Scholarly German poets, such as Schlegel, Rückert, Platen, Bodenstedt, translated exquisite Orientals for the receptive minds of their countrymen. At contact with the miraculous East, Goethe, who was an old man now, cried out that he had been born again:

"*I will follow the herdsman, I will travel with the caravan!*"

Sensitive, romantic Heine began to sing lyrically of the love of

the palm in the East for the pine of the North, and to dream of the Ganges. The treasures of the East were unlocked for the surprised, but the usually conceited West.

This followed the march of the great gray armies.

For ultimate goal of conquest, not only armies contended, but the most masterly, diplomatic letter-writing for a century began. Metternich and his son Victor, Stratford Canning, the Iron Duke, Pozzo di Borgo, Capo d'Istria, La Ferronhays, Count Fiquelmont, Count Lieven, Esterhazy, and Thiers who was now in his youth.

Diplomatic correspondence had never been more impassioned, more worth reading for its own sake, displaying as it did a prophetic value and a romantic interest. The brilliant diplomatists of the Continent were pouring out eloquent instructions upon their bewildered *chargés d'affaires*. The letters of Lieven in London were models of penetration. Like Metternich he was now thundering against Canning, dead, since Canning living had made him suffer. They could not forgive — even in death — his double-dealing, his disrespectful wit, his Irish tongue. They were shocked that upon the back of that document to the English Admiral in the Black Sea (just before Canning died) whom he advised to refrain from battle — in that tricky maneuver against Turkey whom England stood up for and yet was forced to strike at the command of a treaty — when he advised him to refrain from battle, he scribbled: "Fight like hell!"

Old Nesselrode alone wrote dull, musty dispatches which every one made fun of and called stupid, in which there was never a word that sparkled. But when he wrote them, he always knew in the depths of his sly Slav soul — and his deepest velvet chair — that he had won.

The most eloquent and convincing denunciatory writing of the history of man in the past and the conduct of man in the present was put forth by such specialists in human affairs as Mazzini.

Great generals developed to meet great conditions: Paskievich, Woronzow, Yermolow, to name only a few on the Russian

side. The world between Europe and Asia was boiling. It was seething.

With the onward march of armies, ideas had marched co-equally. Thought kept step. Thought was armored now and ready for battle. Behind the barred zenana doors of the Orient, behind the safety shroud of veil and moat, and lock and outer wall, the first faint whisperings of a new order crept. Words that had never been heard before — irreverent, revolutionary, upsetting — echoed derisively down the streets of walled and sun-dried cities. Asia felt dimly that far ahead there was an awakening. She, too, shivered at the touch of change. Another age had come.

This followed the march of the great gray armies.

Subtle, intellectual changes were felt for the first time in Turkey, in Persia, and the Moslem lands adjoining. Modernism began to touch them. New world-thought envisaged them. The result was registered in their art. Art speaks first with the new voice. It speaks first with the new mind.

The chill wind-breath of a changing order touched prophetically the unchanging East. With the death of Canning the power of England fell. She was less dominant in the East. Russia and Persia began to feel a *rapprochement.* In the train of the great gray armies of Nicholas mental friendships sprang up between Orient and Occident. Strange, indeed — unforgettable, sometimes humorous, almost always unbelievable — were its early developments. An Iranian poet — Prince Hussein Ali — was accused of plagiarizing Heine. To him the fez-capped Persian critics of the old school cried out in scorn: "You have curled your hair in the style of Europe! You have stolen Heine!" A picturesque Turkish playwright, son of a priest, made Russian cavalry officer by Nicholas for policy's sake, wrote comedies in the manner of Molière. They were claimed by both Turkey and Persia. They were incorporated in two national literatures at the same time. Young Persian poets made pilgrimages to Peter. Schukowsky translated their great masters of the past. Prophet

and poet, in an ancient calligraphy which was as exquisite as painting, felt tremble within them, unguessed, the new, the dangerously approaching.

Just as the armies of Napoleon had sent perilous torches of thought over Europe, over the twin Americas, bridging the ocean, battling the shores of the Inland Sea, the march of the great gray armies of Nicholas gave the first touch of awakening consciousness — of something new — to the dreaming East, the supposedly unchanging East.

The old world of faith was being cut over into the new world of science. Romance was being dismantled for demonstrated fact, for immediate utilitarian ends. A fearful conquest had begun which meant death forever to the old, a conquest fought first by conquerors upon the battle-field for the awakening of forces through pain, fought later in the scientific laboratory, in the study of the thinker, the philosopher, for the awakening of forces through mind. Life must be uprooted from the past.

Even the Sultan in safe Stamboul felt need of change. He felt need of an army which was accustomed to conquer like those amazing armies which Napoleon had made and Nicholas the First had projected, and trained in the manner of the West. To get ready for it quickly, to waste no time — under the intoxicating, the maddening breath of a New World that was blowing so violently upon him — he ordered the beheading of forty thousand Janissaries.

The Prince Royal of Persia was carrying on a similar meditation in his ancient capital of the turquoise mosques behind the ash-hued mountains. But Schamyl, hidden in the mountain fastnesses of Daghestan, was still crying wildly to Allah as of old, unshaken in faith, and fighting on. In his bravery now, however, there was despair.

Paskievich was taking out his longing, his revenge for lost love, lost pleasure of the senses, in conquest, in prodigious feats of his soldiers, where he squandered ruthlessly the lives of men.

Like a demon Paskievich in the south had swept over opposing forces. Persia, Caucasia, the southern slope (all but Schamyl), Turkey, the Eastern deserts, had felt in turn the force of his fury

turned suddenly by the will of Nicholas from love to death. North-going couriers carried weekly messages of new cities conquered, picturesque strongholds of Islam that had fallen, fresh territory, his gift to his sovereign.

With the soldiers who died died the old world-mind. With the soldiers who died the future crept nearer. What a tremendous thing of unguessed power — to envisage merely but one portion of it — this East, upon whose doors the armies of Nicholas were knocking, would be India, China, with their countless millions, their power of faith, their enduring patience, when provided with trained, scientific minds! Based upon this alone — leaving other things equally important out of the focus — nothing could measure the unfolding future, the new, the different spiritually — the ultimate rhythmic reflection of mind from matter.

That subtle, invisible thing, *thought*, which Nicholas so feared, swift-moving as wind, was creeping into every crevice of the brain, enlarging, uprooting, rebuilding, reuniting. Forgotten prophecies came back to mock the might of men and armies. Faiths were found to be temporary. Out of the depths of the souls of races must come — eventually — that which will conquer and console and then definitely unite. A future so vast, so unlimited it was terrifying, was for the first time shadowed forth for thinkers, conjured into momentary being and reality before the dazed eyes of men.

This followed the march of the great gray armies

The old world of faith, of mystic vision of the East, the last remnant of the eighteenth century, the New World, with its greedy demand for material comforts, equality, were meeting in their last contending struggle. The feudal Middle Age broke up. The power of kings reached its height and fell. Paganism came back with the perishing eighteenth century for a little while just to make man sane again, and virile. All were steps upward toward the level upon which equality — ultimately — was to be displayed. Death to the old! The armies of Napoleon awakened Europe. The armies of Nicholas awakened Asia.

Nicholas grew more and more conceited. He was puffed up by the prodigious victories of Paskievich, which strengthened his power and which he attributed to himself. He was more convinced than ever that God guided him. For him there could be no impossibilities. Before his unbending will, not only Russia, the mountain tribes, Persia, Turkey, Caucasia, must fall, but Europe, change, give up its dream of freedom, and be guided by him. To his associates he became sterner: to his subordinates more domineering. That deadly wine — which no mortal may withstand — unlimited power, was making him drunk.

Life in Peter under the despot was all but unbearable. There was no freedom. The only safe things were to drink, to dance, to gamble, to make love. The world of mind, which under Alexander had resembled the merry, fresh chirruping of young birds in spring, was silent. The great singing voices now came from outside the boundaries. Outside the boundaries, however, they were rich, resonant. Russia's music had become the march of soldiers. It was the Odyssey of the great gray armies. It had become a desert — and dull; silent — like the desert, too.

To his conquering leaders, however, he was generous — even kind. He gave them vast sums of money; titles, estates, swords whose hilts were built of diamonds. Millions of rubles he sent to Paskievich for the conquest of a single city. Paskievich, as Count Lieven had suggested, had made strong the sovereign's autocratic arm. He had spread about a peace which was silent, although revengeful.

Now upon the heights by Erivan the flags were furled. Throughout all the mountain country the bugles shrilled no more. Numberless little hastily improvised log-wood forts and the double-headed eagle upheld by the pitiful little peasant soldiers who went so patiently to death, proclaimed the Autocrat's extended power. Paskievich was the Prince of Erivan (Erivansky).

He had been successful — that great gray spider, who sat spinning his death-webs so busily in Peter. He had been successful in snaring first — and then crushing and destroying — Russia's men of genius. He had been successful in making that

safe, that outspread level of mediocrity, which alone could make him happy in which to mirror himself — lonely and great.

Pushkin's stormy, glorious, but self-forgetful youth was now the property of his people. His periods of atavistic rage were gone. Civilization had clutched him. He had written out in song, and then flung away recklessly, as was his habit, his joy, his old gay defiance. He must live on without them.

In the midst of a confused world — which was rapidly losing its emotions, its power to be happy, its sense of beauty — stood the impassioned Negro poet. He alone now disputed place in public interest — perilously enough — with Nicholas, in that level, outspread mirror of mediocrity which the great gray armies of the Autocrat had made.

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER 1833

Again Nicholas, the Autocrat, stood surveying the progress of a royal ball, and the inauguration of a Court season. This time it was in the Winter Palace instead of the Hermitage, and the scene he looked down upon was not comparable in splendor. Instead of gold and gem-clothed envoys, the rich shop-keeping element were preponderatingly present. This dulled the picture. This flung dust upon the shimmering past. The *bourgeois notable*, which he had been forced to create, as a political buffer between noble and serf, had flourished evidently with a will. It was not alone mind that had grown less brilliant, but more practically serviceable.

The great of the world were still, to be sure, drifting through Russia. It had become the fashion. Here, politically creative forces were to be observed in action. But they were now the great of another class. They were not sovereign princes, representatives extraordinary, an assortment of exotic races in gala holiday attire, such as he had looked down upon at the Coronation Ball which had amazed creation, but the great of the world of mind; men of letters, artists, scientists, trained observers, attracted instinctively by that which was fateful, formative, and epoch-making; men like Robert Browning, Humboldt, Count Krasínski, Adam Mickiewicz; German and Italian socialists; French economists; aristocrats, in short, of the world of thought. They felt sensitively that Slav lands were more dangerously restless than other lands, because they were young, the Slav mind abnormally receptive, and Russia — governmentally speaking — was inexperienced.

Another French Revolution had come — the July Revolution. It had put terror into the brave heart of Nicholas. Since 1831 no man of noble birth had been able to feel sure of himself. Now a world was in anarchy. And a new Russia had begun! Nicholas,

on the crest of the proud victories of Paskievich, when he was beginning to believe that he was a world-colossus, was trembling just as his brother Alexander had trembled. If he was a colossus, he was learning that he was a colossus with feet of clay.

The July Revolution — striking swiftly, striking with fury — had acted as a deathblow to the assurance of the Czar. In slighter degree — because he was slighter emotionally — he began to register the pulsing sweep of the forces which Alexander had found out could neither be measured nor controlled. In every grade of social life there was developing restlessness, there was excess of egotism — characteristics which were to rule the future making their first appearance as political forces.

Something that inclined toward regret was in his mind at the memory that when he came to the throne his country was at peace and safe financially. His own bitter, revengeful heart had brought the changes. Now his hand, heavy and brutal, was insufficient for control. How great was his surprise!

The July Revolution had made him understand — and emphatically — that there was a world of mind that would not take orders from him. It enraged him. But it made him feel helpless. Thought was bubbling — around the globe — like the molten lava in a volcano, and the bubbles might at any time forget their manners and bespatter him, the Royal One. The three words of that proudly made slogan — *Autocracy*, *Authority*, *Orthodoxy* — could not prevent the volcano from bubbling. He stood upon the brink of something he did not like, and could not subdue. Evidently there were more important things in existence than an ostentatious hobby for simplicity and a belief that he could not be mistaken.

Up to 1830 Nicholas had grown conceited. He had grown more and more arrogant. Now the political weather vane was turning; it was marking storms ahead. An outgoing tide of Time was playing wickedly about his feet, for the purpose — ultimately — of sweeping him, too, away. Stormy and iron-hearted as he was, he was beginning to understand that he was at the mercy of forces he could not command. He could not even check the enormous evolution of humanity. He was crushing Pushkin to death, to

be sure. But forces greater still were beginning to crush him. He felt the rhythmic lifting and falling of the dull balance of material forces — the shifting economic equation — which is Nature's unemotional justice.

Years of ruling had changed his face, just as they had changed his brother's. He had not grown pitiful, however — poetic and appealing. His face was whiter; but it was harder, frozen with determination and unyielding will. He would admit no weaknesses. Of the great world of science, which was dawning so securely, he knew nothing. The only weapon he owned with which to oppose this thing, which made him so uncomfortable, was drill, discipline — antiquated weapons of the past. To the rapidly increasing momentum of scientific forces, it evidently made no difference whether he considered himself Galahad the Stainless, or a fallen and warring angel. What did the forces of evolution care about angels or Galahads?

He remembered, too, that nations are strongest where there is no mixing of blood. When the mixing of blood becomes great, then the nation as an individual entity will cease, and life will become universal. He was only a little grain of sand — as all kings had been, as all men have been — blown onward by the rough winds of Destiny. This was a blow of grief. This was a wounding blow of disillusion.

He did not feel so inclined just at present to meddle in everything — in designing costumes, in poking his fingers into the jewel boxes, planning the education of the young — as Cæsar of superlative creative strength had been able to do. Duty kept multiplying demands. Even he was feeling the drain of that uncalculated emotion which is living.

He had looked down upon the earlier Coronation Ball with contempt, with a feeling of superiority for dancing merry-makers. Now he looked down upon ball and dancers in a different mood. He felt unsafe. He thought now that he would plan how to divert the popular mind. It was better for men to dance and make love than to plot. He would join the Don and the Volga by means of a canal. It would be a good time to consider a general codification of laws. And he who hated progress, and who set

his face resolutely against anything which he had not first suggested, was thinking of that newly discovered, greedily discussed, means of quick steam transportation between Peter and Moscow, which had been tried out upon one of Prince Metternich's Austrian estates.

Only the victories of Paskievich in the south and east made him at this moment secure. Only that hint which he had utilized — in the famous letter of Count Lieven from London, so long ago — that in Paskievich there was the making of a great general, kept him upon the throne. If it was Count Lieven's brains it was the power in action of Paskievich's sword. Well! Well! — Well! Well! How the world stood on its head — the world which was old enough to know better!

French socialists were declaring that the future would have no pie-eating in private for kings, and that the black-bread ration was going to be general. They talked such things in Russia — *his Russia!* His Polish subjects — governed by his brother — were sympathizing openly and defiantly with the leaders of the July Revolution. Brilliant Poles were in Paris, pouring their hearts out in eloquent hatred of him. His Russian subjects were there imitating them. The monarchy of the Netherlands, of which his sister Anna Pawlowa was Queen, was falling. There was revolution in Sicily. It was threatening in Italy. The outlook was not encouraging.

He began to feel lonely. Metternich, his most powerful supporter, was growing old. He had become increasingly involved, too, in domestic affairs. He, Nicholas, was outplaying England in the East, to be sure. But it was partly because England did not know how to measure the subtlety of the Slav, and she had the Opium War to think of. He did not approve of England's Liberal policy. Diplomatic relations with France had been more than strained since the July Revolution and Louis Philippe was king. The anger of Nicholas had caused the recall of La Ferronhays as ambassador, and Baron de Bourgoing had taken his place.

The power of autocrats throughout Christendom was breaking up like ice in the Neva under the dissolving sun of spring.

Social demoralization was going forward. There was a general mental reaction against the sacredness of hereditary power. The ideals of another society — and one that he was learning to fear — were on the way. Already half the earth's surface — the Twin Americas — had been set aside for the first shy try-out. This might encourage Europe to a later but a bolder try-out. Men like Mazzini were backing up with the pen the sword of the Little Corsican in effort to destroy the old ideals. Mazzini had just written: "Ideas grow well when watered with the blood of martyrs." He did not approve of this sentiment. It made him feel uneasy.

While he supposed — conceitedly — that he was guiding affairs, another Russia and a strange Europe — without his knowledge or consent — had arisen right under his guiding hand. Rapidly, indeed, the royal past was crumbling. Man was insisting upon dressing his mind in uncomfortable, ill-fitting clothing. He, Nicholas, was forced daily to fling away some cherished possession of the past. Daily, according to the limited power of his brain to comprehend, he was learning new facts.

He was more and more astonished at the acrobatic feats of two words: *Truth, Good.* They did not stand their ground. They behaved improperly. Were they cheap commodities? Were *Truth, Good,* merely articles to be auctioned off in the crowded, dusty market-places of Time? Did they fluctuate like the price of hogs and horses at the noisy fair of Great Novgorod!

Was he, too, only a penitential pilgrim — just as his brother had been — as are all pilgrims — merely an individual who must battle forever with riotous winds? Nothing seemed to remain where it was. He was a prodigious figure, to be sure, in the political world, no matter what private judgment upon his personal ability might be. But the period of the prodigious figure — Czar or poet — was passing. It was time for the leveling now. He was shaking off the drunkenness caused by the wine of unlimited power.

For these reasons he decided Russia should dance and forget, gamble and make love. It was the worn-out trick of the Cæsars to keep the populace amused. Royalty's power of inventiveness

was exhausted. The third greatest period of Russian frivolity was opening, because Revolution had placed fear in the heart of the Czar, and because he knew it was wise to banish memory of the many dead in the wars.

Nicholas saw Châli entering upon the arm of his new ambassador to Constantinople, Orlow, his favorite.

"Orlow is a great name! It will dazzle the foreigners there. And I can trust him politically." The look upon Orlow's face made Nicholas thank God then that he was not as other men are. Surely to him who was superior to weaknesses of the flesh — like Orlow — God ought to be gracious.

Orlow had hastened from Constantinople, leaving a substitute temporarily in charge, in order to urge Châli to return with him. He had suffered from loneliness, and a sort of homesickness of the heart, in the far-away Turkish capital. He had thought of her continually. He had spent every moment of leisure in making plans so that he could be with her. He looked older to-night than usual, and weary. Countess Orlow was still in the country. She steadily refused to return to a city whose ruler had disciplined Photius, the priest. She spent her time in going from one of her estates to the other, where she was establishing religious schools after a plan made by Photius.

As they drove to the ball to-night, Orlow had sensed quickly that Châli was in a yielding mood. Something had changed her. The cause, of course, he could not know. Nor, indeed, did he care, for now his wish seemed near fulfillment. He did not know anything about the occurrences that had filled the long period of her absence, in which he had suffered so. If she was near, that sufficed for him.

In Vienna, Metternich's second wife had died suddenly. The grief of Metternich was profound. Châli had had the opportunity to observe it. He declared that this young girl, who had been ennobled in order to become his princess, was the only woman he had ever loved. Châli enumerated the futile years of her youth which she had given in serving him. She understood now that herself he had not really loved. With all her mental perspicuity she had stood to him in an entirely different relation.

At the time she had not known it. Diplomatically, he had outplayed her, as it was his habit to outplay every one. To him she had been merely a rare object of human art that met the approval of his trained eyes. She had been the chosen companion for recreation after long periods of toil. She had borne about the same relation to him as one of the rare Powder Blue vases in one of his drawing-room cabinets.

Metternich had then sent her on to various European centers in order to report accurately to him conditions that followed that fateful July Revolution in France. During these journeys, no letters from Pushkin had reached her. She could not know whether this was because of constant change of place on her part or because of the prevailing espionage. She had heard nothing of him. She knew, of course, that something must have happened to his letters. On her return to Vienna again, likewise she found no letters from Pushkin. And here she learned — to her amazement — that Prince Metternich was contemplating a third marriage. This time the marriage was not for love, but for reasons of state. She heard everywhere that it was for the purpose of welding Hungary more firmly to himself. Unstable social conditions were bending even the proud Metternich. He, too, must look sharply to necessity. She thought, too, that the accomplished *savoureur* of pleasure was less evident in him than of yore. And he did look older. Disturbed political conditions throughout the Continent had been telling upon him heavily. Now his clear mind had made the observation — but with fear — that at a certain point of mental enlightenment nations become republics. He grumbled. He complained as usual because he was forced to give up the delights of living to play a part in anything as discordant as politics. He could not even console himself for the general disorder by the death of his old enemy Canning, and the coming into power as Prime Minister of England of the Duke of Wellington, whom he had no reason to fear. Now he wanted her personal judgment upon the reaction of Nicholas to the new French Revolution. Was it inclined to spread out across the cities and plains of Russia? How quick and how enduring were its effects going to be there?

"Who is that woman over there — the one every one seems to be watching? She is dancing with Baron Heeckeren-Dantes, the adopted son of the Minister from the Netherlands," she questioned of Orlow, looking for the first time upon the face that had set the Russian world aflame.

"Madame Pushkin."

"Please say it again! I did not hear."

"Madame Pushkin."

"What Pushkin do you mean?" in surprise.

"Pushkin, the poet, of course!"

The glittering room began to swing dizzily, with the dancers. The walls contracted and contracted. They blotted out first the scene before her and then herself. In this moment of surprise, of destructive grief in which she had all but fainted, her body was still erect, and her unseeing eyes were turned toward the dancing beauty who was waltzing nearer and nearer. The two loveliest women in Europe for a moment could have been observed side by side; the one possessing the beauty of eloquence, the enrichments of living and of art; the other the blush-rose bloom of youth.

Orlow had felt the change in her voice. Something pitiful and fine in the heart of him kept him from turning to look at her. But still he did not understand. What difference could it make to her!

When reason and judgment came, her first conscious thought was: "That petted doll-beauty the wife of the great, savage, melancholy Pushkin? What a joke! What a tragic joke!" Torturing memory then insisted upon showing her the lonely farmhouse to which she had driven with Pushkin in an old-fashioned, heavy *britschka*, through the sweetness of the spring; the lonely farmhouse — the bare and empty loft — through whose windows at night had swept the disturbing fragrance of the fields, and that love so violent, so insatiable. Beside her stood the ageing Orlow.

When the first shock of grief had spent its course, she watched the ball distrait and silent. Then she turned to Orlow with what deceptive power she was able to summon. She told him that she would accompany him to Constantinople. It was settled now —

all but the date of departure. Orlow was happy. Facts over which she had no control, not her own will, had decided for her. To be sure, Orlow was more than ever to the front, politically. Even he had become more powerful. She could not doubt his devotion. But still it would be merely an echo of the old life from which she had been wanting to get away. It was life like the other she had known — dependent upon the caprice of a great political figure.

With Pushkin it had been different. She loved him. He had put the missing human element into living for her. With him she counted in an entirely different way. Their relations kept the level of equality. And Pushkin, whom people condemned, had a nature that was noble and self-less. He was full of charming little kindnesses. He had the grace of appealing attentions. Life with him would have meant the pleasant, happy things of home she had not been able to reach. She had had her fill of the grand life — beside a prominent politician — into which now Fate, against her will, seemed to be thrusting her back.

Familiar friends of the Petersburg smart set came up to greet her. Courtiers asked her to dance. Orlow, likewise recently returned, was greeting his acquaintances.

Little old Nesselrode, who admired her, was bowing over her hand as Orlow moved away. She noticed quickly that that acrobat of diplomacy was comparatively comfortable and happy despite revolutions. His developed subtlety, his power of making himself temporarily invisible, so to speak, could foresee ways of keeping balance if not of forwarding his personal plans. Old Nesselrode, she observed, was interested as usual in everything except the subject which his *vis-à-vis* wished to discuss. What a master he was in the saving of energy! He let other people deal the blows. He merely looked on and directed them. The happy blue mist of his squinting, near-sighted eyes was undimmed as it enveloped her. Then she waltzed away in the arms of the handsome Baratinsky.

Young Heeckeren-Dantes, officer of the Chevalier Guards, and Madame Pushkin were still dancing together, to the consternation of the gossipers. Every one was watching them.

They did not care. And if they had cared they were not able to summon sufficient will to separate.

Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes, with the subtler cultivation of Paris and the Netherlands upon him, could appreciate all the æsthetic qualities that went to make up the amazing beauty of the girl-wife of Pushkin. She delighted his eyes. She caressed his senses — this living blush-rose — who possessed the kind of charm that brings destruction. Since the first moment he looked upon her, he had longed for her, and he could not forget her. He had never seen any one so alluring. If he paused to think a moment, he was unable to tell whether it was love or madness that possessed him. He was dreading now the moment when the ball would be over which would take her away from his eyes.

"Point out your husband! I'm a stranger, you know."

"There — the man with the gray eyes — the pallor —"

"That?"

She nodded her blonde head.

"You do not mean it!"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"He's a little yellow Negro!"

The laughter tingled with scorn.

"What is he?" after the pause.

"I do not know what you mean by 'what is he'?"

"Why, his title — of course!"

"Oh! — poet . . ."

"Are you jesting?"

"Will you tell me why I should want to jest?"

"You mean a fellow who strings together couplets?"

"Yes," a little diffidently, as if she were confessing a sin.

Dantes began to laugh. "How could he ever hope to write such a lovely poem as God has written in your face?" His merry brown eyes were serious now, and the mockery was gone. "A woman so lovely as you should be a princess!"

The moving melody seemed to emphasize his words. The sad Viennese waltz-music sobbed on. Their bodies swung respon-

sively to its rhythm. Then, as if speaking to himself, and not caring whether or not she heard:

"Well — *he* — was the lucky one."

Suddenly she felt aggrieved.

"I have seen the courts of Europe," he added. "There is not a woman to-day with a face that can compare with yours."

She felt more aggrieved. His trained feet moved accurately and assuredly beside her. His fashionable, elegantly dressed body swayed to the sad waltz-melody that was sweeping them on.

"He's old — beside you and me — little one!"

Pet words, familiarities, fell from his lips so naturally that she did not notice them. Suddenly it seemed proper that their names should be linked together.

Then young Dantes of the licentious tongue, who was noted for his irregular life, who had a gift for merry blackguardism, made her forget everything by his sharp and laughing observations. She, who had recently come from the country, who was just a little girl out of the schoolroom, had never listened to such a conversation. He could say things of double meaning which were shocking when fully comprehended, but with her less nimble, less practiced wits, meaning dawned slowly. He could conceal requests so subtly that when she understood she felt like screaming with laughter instead of reproving him, just as when she unrolled a huge paper-padded package at the Christmas feasts and could not for the life of her guess what was on the inside of it. His nimbleness of tongue made her dizzy, so that it was not easy to take offense or to make adequate reply. To make reply, indeed, would mean a certain amount of complicity. She had never been so amused in her life.

Pushkin, alone and gloomy, was watching his wife throw her reputation away. Dance after dance throughout the night they had been together, careless and defiant. The scandal had started. He felt that people were watching his face with scorn, with contempt. The dissipated, idle courtiers were probably betting upon the success of Dantes who was pursuing his wife with attentions. His blue-gray eyes changed color. Under the whip of shame his skin flushed light, then dark. While he stood

there, bearing disgrace proudly for the purpose of shielding her, he was now a white man, now a black man.

Young Lermontov, poet, and officer of the Guards, was observing the ball, too, with those gloomy eyes which neither love nor the approval of a Czar could change. In his heart, however, there was pity for Pushkin.

Pushkin was having one of his sickening, sudden awakenings in which he saw in a flash the past as he should have lived it. What he wanted that dancing woman, in whose ear the nimble-footed Heeckeren-Dantes was whispering with such self-assurance, could not give him. Another blunder! At the moment he was at the mercy of the artist's inspired seeing that does not spare even self.

Then his ill-temper swung swiftly from the personal to the universal as his discontented eyes swept the room, astonished at the number of rich mercantile people he saw. Middle-class, untitled bourgeois people, who had made money in the new factories springing up everywhere, the salt-mines, metal-mines, silk and cotton manufacturing plants, smelting plants, which the Government believed the country needed, were part of society. He was seeing prophetically to-night.

They did not have any of the exotic mental cultivation of the old aristocrats. They knew nothing of letters, art, music, manners. They thought it proper to pet a pig if he had a *kopec*. They were capable of no sensations — extraordinary or otherwise — at the surface of a satin, a yellowed marble from Greece, a perfume from Persia. Their emotions were only for the jingling of the guinea, which for them meant a stepping-stone of insolence, from which to retaliate upon their superiors. Their taste in wines was plebeian. They had no conversational meeting-grounds with the old *noblesse*. They had no sympathies, no tastes in common with those whom Europe had cultivated so prodigiously in the years that had preceded the first great French Revolution. They made the social fabric uneven. They made the old life more and more unsafe. They were, indeed, the harbingers of its ruin. Their increasing numbers multiplied complexities. As he stood there watching them, he felt in his

heart the aristocrat's contempt. The social fabric was no longer something uniform, something dependably woven of one substance.

It occurred to him for the first time to-night that the social world which he had seen in his boyhood, at the Court of Alexander the First, was gone. He did not know when it went. He was aggrieved at his stupidity. But he was shocked at its disappearance. He supposed it was something eternal, like the sun and the stars. But it was only a phantom which must now recede forever.

Conceited adventurers, who were acclaimed to have witch-like skill in this manufacturing plan, or that mine-developing project, were crawling in. But if a man could not distinguish between Montijo sherry and melted marmalade, and could operate a mine, why should a gentleman associate with him? A mine was for a peasant, and wine was for a nobleman. Prince Windischgratz had just made the remark that man does not begin below the rank of Baron. Shop-keepers — like servants — were made for the convenience of the nobility. A banker's business was to lend money to a noble who knew how to spend it. Such people were not made to associate with! And it was Nicholas, who was intending to preserve the aristocracy, who was letting this thing happen. Life — if things went on this way — would soon be a vast, level, outspread patch of potatoes, and, saddest of all, the potatoes would be alike.

The drawing-room now, the salon, the place of public gathering, was merely a space for exhibiting the degenerately inflamed ego of a passing civilization where conceit was rapidly taking the place of ability — a civilization passing, because it had reached its limit of expansion. It was the beginning of an exhibition of a world losing its soul to become prodigiously nimble mechanically. This monstrous material toy must temporarily diminish spiritual vision.

He could hear prophetically to-night, in his sadness, with his sensitive poet's mind, the uprising hordes of the future, the released power of the masses in rebellion, just as experience in governing, and fear in the heart — and an equal sensitiveness —

had shown the same picture to Alexander, to Metternich, and now in slighter degree to Nicholas. It was the released delirium of those, starved for centuries, who had stood without the gates and waited.

But they had no more business here, these people, in his opinion, than grooms or lackeys. He did not try to conceal what he felt. They were intelligent enough to see this. They revenged themselves whenever the opportunity presented, in ways that seemed good to them. He did not, therefore, have the support of the old nobility which birth and ancestry made, nor the new nobility which money was for the first time creating.

The eyes of Nicholas and Pushkin, who despised each other, the ruler who wanted reality and the poet who wanted the dream undisturbed, met above the heads of the swaying waltzers. To-night, Nicholas was beginning to understand that reality is less stable than the dream.

Châli, dancing with one partner after the other, had been merely searching for Pushkin, just as he had been searching for her at the Coronation Ball. Now, just as the ball was closing, she found him. He was occupied in watching his wife. She was startled at his appearance of weariness, of sadness. There was something about him broken, something disordered by grief. In her heart she was exclaiming over and over, while she was trying to appear just as usual: "What have they done to him! What have they done to him!"

In her confusion she recalled impetuously that man of power who had improvised with words to her playing — those nights of love in the lonely farmhouse — before she had set out on the long journey to Vienna. He had seized the violin's sweetness. He had flung it forth in words with a kind of magic. He had dominated her with his genius, and with the fury of his virile youth.

The promise she had given to Orlow to accompany him to Constantinople began to fade. It lost reality. It lost importance. She could not go now, she knew. She could not go away now and leave Pushkin here alone with the world against him. She must save him in some way if she could.

Orlow bowed to Countess Nesselrode. He disengaged himself

as speedily as possible from her gossiping tongue in order to join Châli, who had just joined Pushkin. As he took his place silently, almost unnoticed beside them, he thought he saw something dart into the eyes of Pushkin which was like the remembered discharge of passion. Accustomed as he was to dissecting the emotions of women, it occurred to him instantly that an amorous intelligence had passed between them. He watched them enviously. Then he dismissed the suspicion. It was he who was victor now. It would be foolish to worry. He would take her away to Constantinople. She had promised to go. There he would have her all to himself.

Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes and Natalie Nikolaevna Gontscharow Pushkin waltzed up, smiling, happy, and triumphant. Châli was presented to the reigning Court beauty. After a few moments' conversation Châli learned that the astonishing beauty of this woman's body was balanced by the astonishing emptiness of her mind. She observed that, beside this girl-wife, Pushkin looked old. Age was painting its first shadows across his cheeks. As they were saying good-night and preparing to go their separate ways, she noticed the reluctance of Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes to lose sight of the face he adored. But she was astonished when the young beauty turned to Pushkin and called:

"Come — *mon nègre!*"

The ghost of a smile slipped over the listening faces.

In the voice there was the disdain which Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes had just taught her in the waltz.

As they drove away homeward, Pushkin found that his wife was having one of her frequent attacks of ill-temper. She declared that it was ridiculous for the beauty of Europe to leave a royal ball in a hired carriage like a housemaid. It occurred to him that it was his duty to reprove her for her careless conduct of the night. Then he reconsidered. He had always been scolded ever since he could remember, and he did not feel like beginning it with another who was young. She merely had the same native impulse to dissipate which had been born in him. Could he have the face to blame her? And what would it avail if he did reprove her? She was just a charming child, willful, foolish. Her head

was turned with the adulation of too many flattering words from too many false tongues.

As they drove along, he began to listen with a sort of nervous fear to the first chill winds of autumn which were crying to-night like frightened children in the tallest tree-tops. He felt autumn hedging him in; autumn of the year, a too early autumn of his days. The angel of gold on the top of the Church of Saints Peter and Paul gleamed coldly. It was like the chilly smile of the old friends of his youth.

CHAPTER XVIII

GOGOL'S VISIT

Gogol, the young writer, was sitting in Pushkin's study. He had been waiting an hour and a half. Schukowsky had urged him to go, telling him that Pushkin was melancholy since the death of his mother. Gogol had seen the lovely mulatto, who looked so strange against the background of Russia, and who, he heard, had left life lightly just as she had lived it, with the mocking smile upon her lips. She had always teased his artist's fancy because of her exotic charm, her indifference to everything, and her languid grace. He recalled sharpest how easily bored she was.

He had come at the same time to find out Pushkin's opinion of the book manuscript "Dead Souls," the subject of which Pushkin had given him, explaining as he did so just how it must be treated.

Pushkin had gambled most of the night, as was his habit now in order to help pay the household expenses. His wife longed to live in a more and more extravagant manner. He could not meet the bills. He was always in debt. Collectors awaited him at every corner.

As he came in now, carelessly wrapped in an old brown velvet dressing-robe, his blond hair in disorder, his bare feet stuck into slippers, he was pale and tragic. Gogol was shocked. He was confronted by the weary face of a libertine. Pushkin estimated immediately the impression he made upon his friend who had not seen him for some time.

"Sorry I kept you waiting, Nikolai Vassiljewitch."

"I thought you might be engaged with friends, Alexis Sergiewitch," a little diffidently.

"Friends? No — not now!" with one of his ironical smiles.

The ugly, sensitive face of Gogol looked confused.

"I'm a relic — Nikolai Vassiljewitch!" with a fine attempt at *bravura*.

Gogol was unable to find anything to say this time. His shabbily dressed, countrified figure shifted uneasily upon the edge of the chair.

"A relic — dear little brother, Nikolai Vassiljewitch — is something made to revere — but let alone."

Pushkin's old weapons of wit and satire were falling into disuse. They were dulled with grief. Less and less he had the power to wield them.

"They are not neglecting any of the honor due me," he added. "It is about the only thing I am able to collect — in full."

"Dear little brother — dear little brother," stammered Gogol, pushing back the refractory mouse-colored lock that kept falling down over his deep gray eyes.

Gogol had heard how Pushkin was bending beneath the weight of opposition and scorn. And now there was the scandal about his wife. He could see the melancholy hidden beneath the brave attempt at the old jesting manner. But he was so sensitive he could not find on the instant just the words he wanted to say. So he sat and looked with pitying, understanding eyes at the man who had given Russia great moments of emotion and the dominance of whose powerful moods had carried far. Gogol knew that Pushkin had touched heights that lesser men could not even see, and that dwarfed them. He had heard in his country village how in the drawing-rooms of Peter — like a brave and lonely swordsman — he was standing with his back to the wall trying to fight off destruction with his tongue. Then his poet's vision symbolized him sharply — a pitiful little flame flickering in the stormy blackness of a great night that soon would close down forever. He was as helpless, he knew, as he was brave.

Pushkin was searching busily about upon his disordered desk. After a while he fished up a manuscript, "Dead Souls." He drew a chair beside his friend and sat down.

"I do not know, Nikolai Vassiljewitch" — still trying to keep the jesting manner — "but I am getting you into trouble by spurring you on to deeds like this," tapping the manuscript with his fingers. "It is dangerous now to be a poet — and be alive at the same time. How the world has changed! Once one could be a

thief and honored — if a poet. Remember Louis XI and Villon! But now —"

"Did you read it, Alexis Sergiewitch," humbly.

"Did I? I cried aloud before twenty pages: 'God, what a sad country our Russia is!'"

Pushkin was on his feet. He was nervous, restless.

"It's a masterpiece, Nikolai Vassiljewitch! No Russian will surpass it — this satirical, comical picture of your day and mine. You've caught the touch from Cervantes! I told you he was the one to look to."

"But, Alexis Sergiewitch, it's yours, not mine."

"Nonsense." There was savagery creeping into his voice.

"The subject is yours — and the treatment. And you know it. You keep the little subjects for yourself. The great ones you hand on to me."

"I love you, Nikolai Vassiljewitch. Most men love their friends exactly in the degree in which they are able to feel superior to them."

"I know you do."

"It is not myself I am interested in — wholly, Nikolai Vassiljewitch. I have faith in the art of my land. You hear a lot of talk about the decay of my talent. That isn't it! I am turning now into unfrequented paths where I seek, not praise for myself, but æsthetic progress for my race. This new art — you will proclaim. I know that in prose you can write greater poetry than I have ever written. I am glad you have surpassed me."

Tears were threatening to blur the harsh-featured peasant face that was listening.

"Don't be a fool, Nikolai Vassiljewitch! Tut, tut! Here, here, here!" Pushkin turned his back upon him. He walked away. He lighted a cigarette and stood looking out the window.

"The truth is, Nikolai Vassiljewitch" — in a matter-of-fact voice — "I haven't the strength any more for the great ones. I suppose I have thrown away my finest energy upon folly. All that I have done — probably — gives no hint of what I was capable of doing. But — you or I . . . Does it matter? It is for Russia."

Gogol was overwhelmed.

"As I read this" — tapping the manuscript briskly with his fingers — "I knew that in the future, when neither you nor I are longer living, you will be known as the Russian of the Homeric laughter, and I — as the most superb of *dilettantes* — the most accomplished waster. Of me they will say: 'He was cosmopolitan in his art, but he was Oriental in his loves.' You will hear — Nikolai Vassiljewitch — when I am gone, that across my body had swept all the sins of Asia. I am a meridional. I was made for sexual unrestraint, joy, somnolence of sun. That is merely the longing of the palm for light. It is no wickeder! In addition, I belong to two races which civilization has never been able to dominate; the Negro and the Nomad. I am old — emotionally. My great period of creativeness, Nikolai Vassiljewitch, closed with the triumphs of the great gray armies."

Gogol, the ascetic, was shocked. He forgot his grief. And that was just what his companion wanted, from the man whom he had chosen to be his mouthpiece, to proclaim to the world a new art. But this was the monk in him, and the feeling of revulsion lasted only for a moment.

He reflected that his friend had had none of the training of the soldier upon the battle-field, nor the monk in his prayer and solitude. He knew nothing theoretically or by experience of discipline or self-repression. His training had been in emotions.

"I cannot take your work! How can I call it mine?"

"Don't be a fool."

"Do it yourself!"

"I haven't the strength."

"Why not?"

"I am only a flower of youth" — laughing sadly.

"I don't know what you mean."

"It means that I could not stay in bloom. I wrote well only when I was drunk on new loves daily. When I ceased to live wildly, I ceased to create. With me, love and art were entangled. Neither my body nor my brain can buy it back again."

Gogol realized that too many emotions had swept over Push-

kin. He saw that civilization had been grafted too hastily upon him for him to wear it well or long.

"You see, Nikolai Vassiljewitch, I tried — when I was young like you — to be poet, scholar, swordsman, man of the world, all at one time. Now I am losing what Napoleon told Alexander no man may lose and live — *cette puissance de bonheur*. The world has crept into my heart" — his mind reverting to his dissipated wife as he spoke. He whisked the ashes from his cigarette with the finger upon which shone the huge, blood-red carnelian which Princess Woronzow had given him in Odessa.

"In the brief chaos which has been my counted days, I have glimpsed many things, perhaps people will say pitifully, because I had squandered the strength with which to lift them to the visible heights of art. But the glory of the vision will live — because" — pausing in front of the slightly ridiculous, stooped, peasant figure — "I am going to flash their fervor into the brain of you."

Gogol was touched. Pushkin saw it. He checked brutally the rising emotion with words.

"Do you know, Gogol, I think that fundamentally I love folly for its own sake? I adore the life they used to know in France in the *petits maisons!*"

Gogol's face clouded.

"I think myself I am hopeless. Consider what teachers I have had in morality, in self-restraint — and all to no purpose — Woronzow, Schukowsky — and now you. The noblest men of my day. I am always in revolt against something. Remember, Nikolai Vassiljewitch, however, that through you I have glimpsed the vanishing world of the spirit which I did not have the moral strength to reach. Even you, pure as you are, cannot guess how great to me has been this little grace," he added solemnly.

Gogol suffered. How this man played upon him!

"I burned up, Nikolai Vassiljewitch, wantonly, upon the white bodies of women, the power with which I might have reached the heights."

The ascetic face began to quiver.

"I am growing tired, now, of this disenchanting struggle which

is called life. I am sorry that it hasn't any back door — a quick and unseen exit.

"For life there is no training — but there is plenty of punishment if you fail. Weariness, of course, comes easily to people who live as I have — and tarnished joy. I became a man too soon! And then, with the black races, not everything — as with your white race — has been immolated upon the altar of duty. Civilization, Nikolai Vassiljewitch, is scientific sacrifice.

"Now I don't know what I want, I am so confused! I want to wander. I want to travel. I want the freedom of the vagabond. Sometimes the longing is so great that it annihilates all other longings. The only genuine freedom is to have feet — and wise eyes for distance. But I want, at the same time, luxurious material things. Once in a while I long for divine things, like Alexander. But I cannot reach them. I have not, like him, the wings of the spirit. And love — always love —"

"Only your art, Alexis Sergiewitch, can give you what you seek."

"But I tried to procure love with it! I don't inspire love, Nikolai Vassiljewitch. Admiration — passion — yes! Things that burn — but not love. The qualities that destroy come to me, not those that comfort — comfort, and then save. I am like Alexander in that I cannot get hold of any simple, human thing."

Gogol became introspective, meditative. When he looked up his eyes were timid.

"I want to ask you something, Alexis Sergiewitch."

"Well?"

"You know I have lived always in a country village. Besides, I am ugly to look at."

"Well!"

"Please do not make fun of me."

"Out with it!"

"Dear little brother Alexis Sergiewitch, tell me, what is it like to love a woman? Is it worth giving up everything else for?"

Pushkin looked at the face which living had not marred, the man who had lived aloof, pure, above the demands of the flesh.

Words failed. He recalled the wasted nights of his youth. Futilely he tried to remember the women he had loved, and just why he had loved them. He tried to call their faces back to memory, and the especial charm of each. He was amazed as he tried to turn swiftly the pages of that vast volume of wrongdoing which was his past. He looked at Gogol fresh from the fields and thought: "Chastity, maker of marvels, and of strength that endures!" Aloud he remarked: "The best way to be happy, dear little brother Nikolai Vassiljewitch, is to preserve your illusions. The only thing about love that is worth while is that which the body cannot buy. I mean — the pity of love. Love supreme is sexless."

"If you would take art seriously, Alexis Sergiewitch, I mean, reverse your usual manner, you would be happier. I wish you would let me show you the world of faith, of renunciation, as you have shown me the world of art. Life, little brother, is in the hands of God." He looked up with solemn, earnest eyes at the white, restless figure pacing the floor. "Life goes not always well with me, Alexis Sergiewitch. Poverty — I have always known. But of course yours is harder — and now this gossip — about —"

Pushkin lifted a prohibiting hand. But he did not turn his head so quickly that Gogol did not see the grief within his eyes. "He is shielding her," declared Gogol to himself. "Now the Passion Flower is blowing wild with the wind."

"But, dear little brother Alexis Sergiewitch, I am consoled for present miseries, by vision of a better life beyond. I am trying daily to make myself worthy of it. You have not found any such support, you who need it so. You comprehend no spiritual truth —"

Subtle, brilliantly paradoxical, changeful as a chameleon mentally, Pushkin turned upon him.

"That nobility can be in the human heart, I know from you, Nikolai Vassiljewitch. That blocks for me the road to pessimism."

The ugly countenance looked puzzled. A great love shone in the little gray eyes.

"It is I who need your help, Alexis Sergiewitch! We have a mission, you and I, because we are Russians."

Pushkin looked at him questioningly. Gogol began to unfold the religion of his satisfying mysticism.

"The Russian is the only man in Europe to-day whose soul is not dead. That is why he seems strange. But because of that, dear little brother, he has a mission. It is to save the world.

"The Russian is the only one who knows the true meaning of the words of Christ. He holds the secret for which other races are seeking. What they call the ineffective Russian is a stupid way of describing a person whose mind is not utilitarian."

Pushkin was impressed by the sublime faith of the man.

"Dear little brother Alexis Sergiewitch, there is something necessary for complete living beyond the conquests of the great gray armies, the hoarding-up of rubles, the mechanical triumphs of science, and that is what dwells within the heart. If the Russian who knows this seems strange, it is because his soul is still alive.

"There is something within the Russian that makes him seek for right. Other nations pile up tall buildings, they grow proud and conceited, and then they think they have right. The Russian sometimes seems confused, but that is because he is able to see spiritually."

The voice of Pushkin was rich in love as he replied:

"I am not fit for your great faith. Life has marred me too much. I am a butterfly of spring! You wouldn't try to put the camel's burden upon the butterfly's back, would you?"

He laughed brokenly. He tried to string bravely again the old bounding bow of his wit.

Before Gogol could reply, the door was flung open. In it stood a woman dressed in pale blue silk, who recalled vaguely the shimmer of pearls, and blush-roses. She was so graceful and her face was so lovely it took poor, awkward Gogol's breath away.

"Alexis Sergiewitch!" she called in vexation. "Not dressed — as usual! And we are due now at the reception."

She did not wait for reply. She slammed the door with considerable display of temper.

Bashful Gogol arose. He dropped his manuscript. He picked

it up. He dropped it again. He fumbled helplessly along both edges of his coat for a button and could not find one. Pushkin began to help him just as one would a child.

In order to calm him, Pushkin began to talk: "There is only one place now where I can find the old glamour of my youth and live it over again, Nikolai Vassiljewitch."

Gogol looked up questioningly.

"It is in that first book of yours — 'Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka.' When I am down-hearted I quote passages of it aloud. I begin oftenest with this one: 'Do you know the nights of Little Russia? Behold — from the middle of the Heaven the moon looks down.'" The voice that repeated the passage from "The May Night" was deep, beautiful.

"Come again — soon! Don't forget I shall be looking for you!"

Outside, Gogol stumbled along, a figure so awkward, so ill-dressed in homespun made by a village tailor, hair hanging down over his eyes, a round-topped French hat set high on top of his head, that a spark of merriment crept into the most kindly eyes. Grasped tightly in his right hand was the manuscript, "Dead Souls," which Pushkin had declared no Russian could surpass.

The red, the robust sun of late autumn — about to perish — shone down upon him. But with it there was an air so gentle, so soft, that it made him homesick for his village and the fields. He feared that the year was forgetting a part of its progress and was turning round to rush back toward the soft enervation of spring.

CHAPTER XIX

NATALIE NICOLAEVNA

DRESSED for a canter through the crisp autumn air with the hope that it would brace his nerves or steady him a little, Pushkin descended the stairs that led from the floor upon which the living-rooms were situated, to the stone-paved outer hall. Here he met Natalie Nicolaevna. She was taking a morning exercise by way of a little promenade. She had been warned that in order to preserve her complexion in Peter, the city hostile to complexions and youth, she must breathe fresh air daily, and preferably in the morning. She had perched a little pink silk knitted hood on the top of her piled-up, shining curls. She had wrapped a pink shawl, likewise knitted, over her shoulders. She was carrying a blue handkerchief, which she amused herself with by holding up to the light and looking through it, and then waving it to watch it flutter.

"Ever see a color like that, Alexis Sergiewitch?"

"Where did you get it?"

"Monsieur Danzas, secretary of the French Embassy, brought it from Paris. He insists it matches my eyes."

"It does!" he replied. "Forget-me-not blue."

"He was going to give me only six. I insisted on having the box."

"Why?"

"Do I want any other woman in Peter to have one?" she inquired triumphantly. Then she laughed at what she considered her cleverness.

"You little pig!"

He held out his arms as if to draw her toward him. She resisted. Suddenly he was conscious that the childish eyes looking up at him so frankly did not wear an expression of flattering adoration the way they used to. They were critical, appraising. She broke restlessly from his detaining hand. She turned at once to climb the stairs.

"I will tell my sister, Katarina, that I am not going out," she remarked semi-meditatively. The words were not wholly meant for him; she seemed forgetful of his presence, and absorbed in her own thoughts. For a few moments he remained standing idly just where she had left him, flicking the toe of his left boot with his riding-crop, while she ran lightly up the stairs and out of sight.

Then there followed one of those unstable, restless impulses he could not define, and which upset all his calculations nowadays at a moment's notice, and he turned back toward the stairs instead of going out. At that moment a messenger appeared in the lower doorway. He turned to see what he wanted. The messenger brought him some magazines and a pile of letters. Then Pushkin climbed the stairs slowly, crossed the living-room without seeing any one, entered his study and closed the door.

"The usual number of anonymous communications — I see," slipping the letters nimbly through his fingers, "telling me of my wife's affair with Dantes, I suppose."

He read one. Then he tore it up with the others which were unread and threw them into the grate together.

"She is foolish, I know. It is because she is young. But she is not bad!" he remarked aloud, as if in an attempt to convince himself, drawing up an easy-chair, and preparing to look at the magazines on his knees. He opened *Vesnik*. "The Review," as its name indicated, had, as its featured article, Viazemsky's opinion of the young men of the day. The name of Nikolai Vassiljewitch Gogol caught his eye. Viazemsky, at the suggestion of Schukowsky, had read Gogol's unpublished masterpiece which had been inspired by Pushkin — "Dead Souls." It did not meet with his approval. He condemned it *in toto*. He declared that it had neither meaning, power, nor charm. He seemed to have no comprehension of what it meant to convey.

Then Viazemsky went on to talk about Pushkin. He was of the opinion that Pushkin's talent had lessened, that he was losing both initiative and freshness. He closed with the bitter remark that in Pushkin's most recent books there was a distance of two thousand miles from one idea to the next.

"I didn't expect this from Viazemsky!" There was genuine

surprise in his voice. "But he does not intend, of course, to be mean — to injure me! He wouldn't do that! The basic reason is because in art he still stubbornly clings to the old. His mind has been able to keep up with life only in social ways, in politics."

Then, as if seeking more excuses for the bitterness in Viazemsky's article, which he could not get out of his mind, he explained: "I evolve rapidly mentally, and Viazemsky does not. I am speeding on and on, leaving behind me the outworn ways wherein some others continue to dwell. People in general receive life and leave it as they found it. In their opinion life is something that neither progresses nor deteriorates; a level — something changeless. Why should I wear my old opinions any more than my old clothes if I am able to buy new ones? It is the blockhead who does not change his mind!" He put a log on the fire. He watched it sputter and then sparkle crisply. He stretched out his legs as if seeking comfort from the heat.

"By the body of Holy Isaac — I am contradictory! I'm sincere in what I just said, and at the same time I know I'm always on the lookout for some stable, some satisfying thing by which to pitch my tent and rest. It is because only the absolute can please me," he concluded with some self-pride.

"I'll see what this ambitious-looking French review is about! It's something I usually enjoy."

He slipped off the wrapper. He rolled the wrapper up, crushed it in his hand, and tossed it into the grate. "*Ah-ha! — ah-ha!* — a poem to the young Decembrists who met with Ryleiev in the house by the Blue Bridge."

His eyes scanned the pages nimbly.

"By Mickiewicz — my Polish friend whose face resembles a realized dream, painted by an old Italian master," recalling him pleasurably as he spoke.

This article was bitter, too. He pictured Pushkin standing in front of the statue of Peter the Great, uttering revolutionary words. Mickiewicz called him a Court flunkey and a lickspittle.

"This will stir up the wrath of Petersburg, and Nicholas, against me again," he exclaimed. "I'll answer it! I'll give him the lie," he decided. "But, of course, I suppose he does not mean

it just the way it sounds," he tried to conclude bravely after he had thought it over. "After all, words are only words. It is merely part of the literature of slander, which happens to be fashionable now. Such writing originated in the brochure of the Swedish king against Napoleon, in that malicious, but delightful piece of gossip 'Nights of Saint-Cloud.'"

He bent to pick up a letter which had dropped unnoticed by the side of his chair. It was unsigned, and he did not recognize the writing. It contained a copy of a fable by Krylov. He understood that the following words were meant for him because they were underlined:

Sing, birdie, sing, cried the cat to the nightingale
Which she holds in her claws ready to destroy.

The meaning was clear. He was the nightingale, and Nicholas was the cat. It was brilliant and witty, and he could not restrain a smile.

"I shouldn't think Krylov, my friend, would have done that, though!" — his face wearing its pained expression again all of a sudden. "It is ridicule — *une chose terrible*," he added. "Wherever I turn my eyes, I meet barriers, built up by the hatred, the envy of people. But I do not care! I will defy them — all of them. It is only when man listens to himself that he is dominant. The needs of my nature are different from theirs — greater. I can see that I have weakened since I began to bend to the will of other people.

"The reason that some of the others seem to get on better than I do — financially, materially — is because it takes a certain amount of dullness, a certain amount of prejudice — not to mention cringing and hypocritical fawning — to lead a well-regulated life. Dullness and prejudice are high fences that keep stupid people where they belong. I'm no lickspittle if Mickiewicz did call me that!" He chuckled to himself. He lit another cigar. He threw himself upon the long divan which was placed before the locked doors between the family sitting-room and his study, in order to dream awhile and idle. Alone in his study, dreaming, with the world shut out, sometimes he was happy. He

clasped his hands under his head. He looked up at the ceiling and saw nothing. The fever of life fell from him. He became serene, powerful. Great vibrations thrilled through him, in contact spiritually as he was with the mystic sources of creative beauty.

In that land of dreams, of plastic and imperial visions, where he fled so often to seek happiness when life had wounded him, his lovely wife was unable to follow. In that trackless, unmarked country of the mind — which usually means loneliness in life — she did not know how to find the way. There were no paths for her.

He recalled now — to comfort himself — those sumptuous pictures of the Orient which Châli had shown him in tone. Ah, if he could only see them in reality — and with her! Russia was a land that was harsh and undeveloped. He wanted the richly ripened splendor of old civilizations, and exotic landscapes sullen with light. He longed to live like a Satrap. His visions, his desires, were Asiatic in their splendor. The only reality he had ever known that had approached them was the Coronation Ball of Nicholas which had marked an epoch in his life. With his brain he had lived through all the different ages of the world. He swept across time and space. He was just coming to the conclusion that he would have been happy in the Asia of Alexander the Great, before the penitence of Christianity had come to dull its richness, when a little laugh rang out. He became alert. The vision faded. That was just the way his wife laughed when Dantes recounted to her his adventures. He listened intently. Dantes was there. They were sitting on the divan on the other side of the door. Her youthful voice was bright. It rang clear like silver.

"They say he is a great wit, my husband — one of the greatest in Europe. But he bores me! How can I laugh when I am never quite sure what he means?"

The reply of Dantes was so low he could not hear it. Vaguely he felt that he gestured with his hands as if to caress her.

"He is the worst company in the world — for me."

"Why did you marry him?" Dantes questioned.

Pushkin fancied that Dantes sat up erect then and looked at her interrogatingly.

"I was a green little girl . . . He was celebrated. People talked about him. And he promised to take me to Court."

"And now?" The voice of Dantes was eager. There was the ring of suppressed passion in it.

"Well . . ." She hesitated.

"Out with it, darling child."

"Well . . . He is so strange —"

"How?"

"He walks about with his head in the air, his eyes dilated, muttering words I can't understand. This way!"

She gets up. She begins to mimic him. The two roar with laughter.

"Only the commonplace is safe," thought Pushkin sadly in his concealment on the other side of the door. Their laughter stopped suddenly. Pushkin sensed that Dantes was trying to pull her down upon the sofa beside him. But his wife's voice was still merry, still childish. There was no emotion in her. As he listened to his wife and Dantes making fun of him, it occurred to him for the first time that the days, the hours, the activities, in short, of a person like himself must seem strange to others. Upon a sudden, harshly, he saw himself from her viewpoint. He tried to think this, too, by way of excuse for her. "Activities like mine cause a vast displacement in the usual ordered life. They lack all the logic of everyday existence. It was something like this — the greater the ship, the greater its displacement in the water." So his customary unhappy existence must come back, not to excusable wonder and ignorance, but to something more severe — logical working of natural law — figures of mathematical balance. He would excuse her if he could.

"I'm vexed continually," she was explaining now, "at his days of dreaming silence, his inaction."

"I don't blame you! What nobler object could he have, I would like to know, than to dress properly — and keep properly — a woman who looks like you?"

"If he is active for a few days, it is followed by days when he does absolutely nothing. He will not even dress. He will not comb his hair! He wraps himself up in an old brown dressing-

gown, sticks his bare feet into a pair of slippers, and lies on the sofa — speechless — unseeing . . . I never saw such manner of man."

"What do you say to him, Natalie Nicolaevna?"

"'Go to work,' I say. 'Get up — earn money —'"

Pushkin began to feel that he was merely a working-man. That was the way his wife looked upon him, a working-man whose duty it was to sacrifice himself to buy baubles. Any failure to do so would meet with quick and general condemnation. He did not count.

As he listened to the conversation on the other side of the wall, he was surprised to realize that in marriage he had found no great emotion, no noble and uplifting joy such as would save him, and such as Schukowsky had preached about so often. It was just one *liaison* more, he told himself in this moment of plain speaking, only this time it was a sad and tiresome one, and one that he could not get out of. Foolishly he had believed what the wise world said. If he were such a fool as that, how could he condemn his wife? He found himself now in the awkward position of defending her — even pitying her follies — because they were of a similar kind to what had been condemned in him. He had childishly believed that salvation was in marriage, because people had said so. What an ass he had been! To himself, then, wildly upon the instant, under pressure of the torturing present, he confessed: "I have felt greater emotions many times before!"

But there was something about her helplessness, her extreme youth — or perhaps it was the babyish look in her blue eyes — that made him pity her. She was blamed continually. She could not always be wrong! He knew that she was foolish, but he did not believe that she was guilty. And if she were — could he, of all men, condemn her? He was beginning to look upon her and himself as two partners in misfortune. They were two prisoners who happened to be confined in the same cell. And she could not understand. That made it harder.

"He says" — the clear, careless voice was continuing — "that writing does not come out of the pen, but out of the soul. Think of that — when I've watched him write! I told him then — when

he said it — that I did not know it was such a serious thing to be a poet. I thought it was just fun."

"It's a shame for him to make you live like this! I wish you'd let me furnish an apartment for you — the way they furnish them in my Paris for women who are lovely like you! I would like to make the setting you deserve."

The voice of Dantes trembled. There was a note in it which made Pushkin able to measure the sincerity of his emotion. He was in earnest. He loved her.

"I'm lonesome with him, too! Most always. Even when his body is here, his mind is not. It is always — his mind, I mean — somewhere where I cannot go. You see, don't you, I'm alone?

"Once he read a poem to me. He tried to come back and get me, I felt — take me where he was — to keep me from being so lonesome, perhaps."

"What did you do?"

"I went to sleep."

"Why did you do that?"

"It bored me so. I couldn't help it! And he's so emotional. I cannot tell you how it displeases me all the time."

"No wonder," was the answer. Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes was touched. His voice showed it.

"I cannot be merry . . . happy with him . . . the way I can with you. I like merry people and little jokes; — and games; — games very much."

Pushkin, on the other side of the door, was reflecting that people who have no emotion of their own dislike the display of it in others. Emotion which surged within him was an irritant to her cold, careless nature.

"Sometimes he is so wild! I'm afraid of him. I feel as if I were surrounded by flames. And then again he is so foolish. A toy can amuse him for hours. One day he went wild over a Siberian amethyst, just such as I have seen a hundred times. He declared it was a violet dipped in wine.

"I'm almost always lonely! I do not know just how to make you understand, Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes. It is as if he were in some far, some high place I cannot climb to."

The words made Pushkin suffer.

"Worst of all, little one, he's old! And as he is more and more governed by emotion, his physical body resembles more and more the race from which he came. He is drawing nearer to it. You look and see if it isn't so. It was a great joke for you — this marriage!"

He laughed a laugh in which scorn and contempt were about equally mingled. She was unable to measure the force of it. Pushkin did not care in the least about the reference to his birth. But the statement that he was old hurt. He could not endure the thought of growing old. It drove him mad that it was the fate of all who live. And yet he could not really believe that it would happen to him — idol of youth — whom women had loved and the gods had gifted. It was right enough for other people, but not for him. Suddenly he heard his wife agree with Dantes that he was old.

"The body of him looks shabby beside the youth of you, little one. And he hasn't even a title!"

She felt aggrieved, just as on the night of the ball.

He who still longed to sweep over life and rule it, who dreamed of youth and its unstinted emotion, was surprised when he paused to number his years, and then hers. He was old beside this fresh flower of youth, this budding blush-rose, and, worst of all, *blasé*. He could no longer meet her moods as Dantes could. He had poured out the passion of his manhood, and the strength of his body, like the spendthrift of life that he was, long ago, in Bessarabia; by Ismail — under those dazzling moons of the south, with a gipsy mistress; in Odessa; at the foot of the eloquent Caucasian Mountains; by the banks of the Don; on the steppe. Other men squandered gold. He squandered life — something more precious. Always he surpassed them. His wife wanted life's gay, fresh, restless emotions. Some of him lived in the past. All of her was of the engaging present. Because he had been a spendthrift, did that mean that life for her must be put on half-rations? In marrying this child, he knew he had gratified one of his fleeting, personal desires for the forbidden. It was merely another example of living by his emotions instead of by his brain. He lost run now of what

was going on on the other side of the door, because his own thoughts were, for the moment, so much more absorbing. But it was peculiar how people were untrue to him! His family first, and now his wife; and practically all his friends. There was Châli — however! Then he remembered the pity in the eyes of Châli the night of the ball after her return from the long stay in Vienna, when he had missed her so, been so at loss without her guidance. Perhaps he had changed in some way. Her face seemed to say so. If he had only escaped from Russia! He cursed the careless artist's habit of living from day to day! Life was taking away his happinesses. He could not seize nor hold anything. Everything slipped away from him just as he slipped away from people, and he was left alone. A voice loud and merry pierced his meditation.

"Why do you not want me to call my sister Katarina in? I want to play hide-and-seek! Never did I play that game as much as I want to."

"I want to look at you."

"Can you not look at me if Katarina is here? You're getting to be as silly as my husband."

"Be quiet — be quiet — darling child! Try to understand. I can never look enough at you."

The voice was sad. It was earnest.

Then he heard Natalie Nicolaevna, michievous and merry, calling Katarina to come.

He turned over. He buried his face in the pillows of the divan to try to shut out sight and sound. He knew now that he longed to be young forever, like those two on the other side of the door. He knew that he longed to love forever. The dull, sad, late autumn outside was sending its gray muted light through the long narrow window of his study, to blur the outline of the room, and to touch with its slight depression his recumbent body.

CHAPTER XX

NID D'AMOUR

THIS was the third week that young Dantes had waited upon an appointed day and hour for Madame Pushkin. He knew, of course, that she would be late. It amused her to make people wait for her. She enjoyed feeling that nothing could begin until she arrived. But still it made him suffer — the fear that again she might disappoint him, the fear that another day would pass and he would not hold her in his arms.

The night before, at an entertainment at Princess Bagration's, where he had been able to procure only a few minutes' conversation alone with her, he had slipped into her hand a blue leather case embossed with a tiny pink rosebud. This held the key to the apartment he had been furnishing for her.

It was in the same, outlying, now unfashionable quarter of Old Peter, in which was situated the secret club from which Schukowsky had rescued Pushkin from danger. Here stood rows of old mansions built long ago by the nobility. They were the town houses for the period of the Court season of rich landed proprietors and noblemen who lived the rest of the year in the country upon their lonely estates. Changing conditions, the rapidly growing higher cost of living since the Napoleonic wars, the increasing habit of employing German overseers who fleeced the pleasure-loving estate owners, and taxes mounting rapidly year by year, had impoverished many of them to such an extent that their town homes had had to be given up. These huge dwellings of the royal days of Catherine the Great and Paul the First had been bought up by foreign speculators — largely Swedish and German — and built over into apartments for hire, after the manner prevailing at present in Paris. A changing civilization was rapidly bringing about changes in every department of living, and it was all in the same direction, namely, lessening the power,

the well-being of the aristocrat, the merging of the chosen, in short, with the masses.

One floor in one of these houses Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes had rented. He had secured the services of one of the most expensive French decorators in Petersburg to remodel it, to make it lovely, luxurious, a proper setting for the human gem for which it was designed. He had expended his own fortune upon it, and made countless sacrifices. He had borrowed from his foster-father, the Minister from the Netherlands, on the pretext usually of pressing gambling debts until the old man had become suspicious, and would lend no more. Then he had borrowed all that he could from his social acquaintances, until the report got about that he had beggared himself for the woman with whom every one knew he was infatuated.

Now, despite the fact that he had urgent duties that called him elsewhere, he was standing nervously behind the cream lace and embroidered blue-satin window hangings of the boudoir, looking alternately at the watch he held in his hand, and peering down the long street.

The first snow was falling, or, as they say in Russia, "The white flies were beginning to swarm." The snow was deep enough now so that it softened the sound of horses' feet, and blurred objects at a distance in a dazzling white shifting mirage. In fear and suspense he saw one vehicle after another — powdered white — pass silently. He wondered if she would be able to remember the instructions he had given some time ago. He had cautioned her to take first a carriage for the business quarter as if she were going shopping. There she was to get into another carriage for hire, and drive to the address. He had told her over and over to pull the carriage curtains down and to have the coachman drive close to the entrance, so that she need take but a step before being inside and out of sight. This would lessen the danger of being seen. But she had paid so little heed to his words that now he feared she had forgotten them entirely.

He observed a carriage stopping. He held his breath when he saw that it was on the other side of the street. He was in an agony of fear and hope. Then the carriage turned around slowly and

drove away. As soon as it was gone, a charming figure of grace began battling happily with the dazzling snow, and in his direction. How could she be so reckless! She was unveiled, too, and as uncaring as if she were paying an inconsequential call. Now he could see her rosy face, and the eyes whose hue never ceased to astonish him. She was laughing and merry. He ran to the door.

"Little one!"

He poured his heart out in his voice. He drew her within hurriedly. He closed the door roughly. Then he began to feel safer.

"Did you come to-day because you longed to see me?"

"I came so that you could admire my new furs. This is the first snow. You remember how warm the autumn has been, do you not? It's the first time I could wear them."

"Stand still! Stand still! I'll take them off for you."

He unfastened the coat of sealskin. He pulled off the long gloves. As he did so, he kissed the little fingers one by one. She watched him and laughed, and the little dimples danced about her mouth. He lifted the modish sealskin hat. Then he held her in his arms a long time, and buried his face — as if seeking relief from some agony — in her scented hair which was deep and soft like the hair of a little child.

She broke away impatiently.

"How can I breathe? Besides, I cannot wait to see how it looks."

Happily, with curiosity, but forgetful of him, as usual, she set out on her tour of inspection.

"What a wee, wee kitchen!" — poking her head in, but drawing it back very quickly.

"Off it a maid's room."

He was following her.

"Dining-room, too? Lovely! In green and gold. Both colors I like." She clapped her little hands.

"Look at the table, darling child! But I beg you to be quieter."

"It's just a table, isn't it?"

"Set for two. Can't you see?"

He watched her flitting gracefully from object to object. In all

the rooms there were bouquets of pink rosebuds, which he kept continually for her. They symbolized her some way in his mind when he was lonely, and she was not here. In the long hours when he had waited for her and she had not come, love and emotion had made him almost a poet as they do sometimes commonplace men, and he had said over and over to himself, beginning to excuse her just as her husband did: "When the bud is folded, who can tell what will dwell in its heart when it blooms?" This expressed all his longing that she might some time be different — might care.

The little drawing-room delighted her. It was, indeed, an ideal nest of love. It had been made for her and it suited her. She clapped her hands, she screamed with delight when the door was opened. He seized her quickly and kissed her lips to silence.

"Too bad *mon nègre* did not think of things like this for me where I live . . . In those shabby rooms — where those ragged-haired artists I detest so come" — with a little gesture of displeasure.

She forgot her temporary displeasure, however, when she crossed the threshold to the boudoir and the adjoining bedroom. They were in pale blue and cream lace. She paused to admire herself in one of the mirrors which were numerous. One by one she picked up the articles on the toilet table which were marked with her initials, and examined them. Then he had to pull her forcefully away from a window, where she insisted upon standing to look out. He was relieved when she became quiet and sat down upon the *chaise longue* in the boudoir. In front of it stood an ivory and enamel table which likewise bore its burden of roses.

"Little one, you belong to me — here. I have rights! And I have waited so long."

He dropped down beside her. Carelessly she eluded his caressing arms. She slipped over to the other end of the seat and laughed, just as when she was playing a game.

"If my happiness is stolen — it is all the happiness I am able to procure," he added, a twist of pain marring his smooth, youthful face. Then his eyes observed by accident the French color prints in their gold bow-knot frames that adorned the walls. From some

unsuspected impulse of memory he recalled sharply a portrait of Mary Stuart painted when she was a Princess of France, which he had probably seen somewhere in some old French palace. Without conscious volition on his part, he knew that the face of the woman beside him was like it: fickle, sweet, cruel, changeable. Like Mary Stuart she could send a man to his death with a kiss and forget. She was sitting there beside him looking eagerly about. She was lovely, fresh-skinned as a spring blossom, seductive.

Her husband, he knew, was worn out with emotion, with weary and overstrained nerves.

He found her difficult to-day, however. She insisted upon talking about everything except the subject he wanted to talk about. Her childish incomprehension was so great that it had the value of audacity and cleverness. He all but lost his breath when he heard the voice beside him asking suddenly:

"Shall I bring Katarina next time?"

Helpless, he looked at her.

"It's a splendid place for games; the way those doors in there open. Between two there are little entry ways — doors on each side — you can easily hide behind. Besides, I want Katarina to see it!"

"Are you jesting?"

"Why — no!"

"No one — no one — darling child, must know of this!"

He felt that his words of warning merely skimmed the surface of her mind. His voice deepened. He moved nearer.

"Darling child, try to understand! I have beggared myself — literally beggared myself — to make this — this *nid d'amour* for you."

"Why did you do it?"

"Can you not guess?"

She shook her pretty head. Then she forgot all about his question and fell back upon her own thoughts:

"My bootmaker declares that only Princess Woronzow has feet as good-looking as mine."

She stuck them out. She looked down upon them with approval.

"Once in a while, little one, can you not think of me?"

She turned upon him eyes that had the clear brightness of a bird's.

"What shall I think?"

"Doesn't your heart tell you?"

She shook her head again, but this time with a bored gesture. Then she began to laugh at the reflection she caught of herself in a corner mirror, and recalled a story. She told it stupidly. She forgot the point, and it had no meaning.

"How do you expect me to talk with you," a little pettishly, "if you do not try to hear what I am saying?"

"Do you not care any, little one?"

"All men ask me that."

"Am I not different?"

"Different! How do you mean?"

"I mean, don't you feel differently toward me?"

She gave him again that uncannily bird-like look.

"Love me — can't you?" His voice shook. "I long for you as the desert longs for rain. I am thirsty — for love!" he added.

"I never saw a desert."

"It was a figure of speech, darling child."

"Well, I don't like figures of any kind! *Mon nègre* talks to me of figures — figures of housekeeping — figures of debts —"

"Little one — little one, time is passing. I cannot tell you how I have longed for you — how I have suffered!"

The tone would have surprised any acquaintance of the frivolous Dantes.

"I am living like an anchorite — just for you!"

"What is that?"

"It means I love you."

"All men do!"

"What did you come for?"

The words fell from him suddenly, almost without his knowledge. They came from the depths of his deep disappointment.

"To be merry — of course! Play games without being interrupted. Very much do I like to. And you know it!"

He looked at her. Forget-me-not eyes; a mouth sweet, wistful,

appealing. The complexion of a flower on the first day of June. He sensed freshly, with a sharpness that was grief, all that about her that melted the heart. A child grown up — keeping still the child's enchanting, irresistible grace; its pearly texture of skin.

"I think" — meditatively — "when I go," getting up as she spoke, "that I'll put the pink rosebuds from the boudoir table here in my corsage. I'm to drop into Princess Woronzow's on the way. Monsieur Danzas told me last night, at the French Embassy, that rosebuds are my flower. Did you see this? He brought it to me from Paris" — taking out the handkerchief. "He insists it matches my eyes." She held it up for him to see.

He caught her in his arms with an impetuosity he could not restrain. He longed to kiss her. She paid no attention to the kisses. There was roguish merriment in her eyes and disappearing dimples at the corners of her mouth, as she tucked the handkerchief mischievously into his coat pocket while he held her.

"What a joke when he finds it!" she thought. Then she broke from his detaining arms and ran merrily into the hall where her furs hung, as if she were starting a game.

"No! no! no!" — grief and anger in his voice. "I have waited too long —"

She drew a deep breath of relief which was not lost upon him, as she slipped into her furs. He felt that she was eager now to go. He watched her take out a diminutive gold mirror which was another one of his reckless extravagances and begin to dust with care her little white nose.

"No, no! We dine here — just you and I. It's our housewarming. It's your homecoming — *to me*. How can you go when I have waited so long — when I love you so —"

Disappointment, the fury of emotion unappeased, rang in his voice. A spasm of grief contracted his face, making him suddenly older.

"To-night — together, in there . . . we light the candles. Do not dare to disappoint me! I warn you. I cannot bear it again."

Now he knew she was really in haste to get away. Her mind was somewhere else already. She began to dance lightly toward the door.

"How could I listen — if I wanted to — to all the men who make love to me? It would be impossible. Do not be angry!"

Overcome with his reckless, futile chase for this woman who had so enslaved his senses, for whose possession he would have committed any crime, and realizing that there was nothing but constant disappointment ahead for him, and at the same time that he did not have the strength to give her up, he cried: "You are killing the soul of a man . . ."

For the moment, in his wounded heart he cursed her, as, white and tragic, he watched her go away. Regret, realization of the money he had squandered, the terrors of desire, the feeling of being baffled, and having been made a fool of, dazzled him with their fury. She opened the door. She went away unemotional and merry, just as she had entered.

He staggered back to the boudoir. He dropped down upon the *chaise longue* where just a few moments before they had been sitting together, and where still her perfume lingered. The silence, the emptiness oppressed him. He began to suffer afresh. He walked over to the long dressing-table. In the mirror that hung above it, he saw dangling from his pocket the handkerchief that matched her eyes. He intended to take it out. He intended to put it away in the dressing-table for safe-keeping. He walked on through one of the little entries, and on and into the empty dining-room, where the silver candles still waited for the feast that had not been. Here he poured himself a drink. He drifted on into the drawing-room. He selected a cigar from a square box of Dutch silver. He lighted it and tried to smoke. The silence tortured him so that he decided to put on his coat and drive over to the club to dine. There at least would be faces he knew. There would be company.

At the club he ordered dinner. He tried to wait patiently and with some dignity for its coming. But when it did come he could not eat. He found that he was in a panic of fear that some of his gay companions of the Guard would drop in, sit down beside him, and insist upon his listening to some of their successful love affairs. Then he thought regretfully, with something like reproach, of the old man who had brought him up and been so patient with his

follies. When he entered his home a half-hour later, the Minister from the Netherlands looked up gladly. Young Heeckeren-Dantes felt ashamed now that he had left him so many evenings to dine sadly and alone.

"My son!"

Young Dantes threw himself upon the floor at the old man's feet. He buried his face on his knee.

"Help me," he sobbed in desperation, "to get free from this mad love! If I cannot break away from it, I do not know what the result will be. It is taking away all my happiness."

When he lifted his face and looked up, the Ambassador from the Netherlands noticed how this bastard son of his, by a wayward woman whom he had loved — loved still and was unable to forget — resembled the mother. The past rushed back. It confronted him. Across the face of the son swept the same grieved look, like little summer cloud-shadows, which he used to watch when he had wounded her. He recalled acutely the sad wistfulness of her eyes, and her inability to answer back. It was this inability to answer back that filled him with remorse now in the retrospect of years. He recalled the helpless, upward glance of her blue eyes — shy as half-hidden grass flowers — and how they contrasted harshly with hair the color of a raven's wing, all the haunting combination of sweetness, weakness, and immorality. The mouth that used to tremble so — and was too falsely red. And how he used to know, and how the knowledge grieved him, that, with all these physical exquisitenesses, she was vulgar and resembled a *demi-mondaine.* It hurt him again to-night just as it used to.

"A sin is the only thing that endures forever in its consequences, recurring and recurring," he thought helplessly, "and cannot die." He hated Madame Pushkin for the way she had upset the boy's life. He had taken him away from France and its memories to Russia purposely; to a new, a strange land, where he intended to establish him with a safe career in the army. And then, marriage to a woman of rank and wealth. In Russia he had planned that the son should escape the mistakes, the regrets, that had blasted his own happiness. And now Madame

Pushkin was making the plan impossible. She was destroying the son's life just as he had destroyed the mother's. The affair was making him think too much of the past which he hoped he had put away forever. He felt justified whenever he could injure either her or her husband. For months he had been trying to destroy them by means of anonymous denunciations. He had made friends of Pushkin's enemies, in order the more easily to take revenge for this bastard son whom he loved with the bitter memory of the wrong he had done to his mother. As he looked at the young, graceful body bent in grief at his feet, he resolved that he would make them both suffer until he was satisfied.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CLUB

No sooner had young Heeckeren-Dantes left the club and the untouched dinner which he had ordered, but could not eat, than Prince Viazemsky and Count Alexis Orlow, both in evening attire, who had been standing in one of the doors on the lookout for an empty table where they could talk together and enjoy themselves in freedom, made their way to the place they watched the popular Heeckeren-Dantes leave. Some time of the day or night most men of fashionable Petersburg drifted through this club to eat, to drink, to gamble, or to gossip, because at present it happened to be preferred by the smart set. They sat down. They shoved the dishes back. While they were looking about for a disengaged waiter to summon, they lighted their cigarettes and looked across with friendly eyes at each other.

"I cannot understand what the hindrance is, Viazemsky," Orlow began. "The night of the ball, Châli promised to go to Constantinople with me without any insistence upon my part. While we were watching a waltz, she turned to me of her own accord and said that she would go. A few moments after that she declared that she was going to throw over the position of spy with Metternich of which, of course, she must be weary. And I do not approve of her keeping it longer, myself! She has been a gilded vagabond long enough, going about from place to place, at somebody else's command. It is natural that she should want something stable — like other women." The aristocratic blond face of Orlow looked puzzled.

"But what does she say, Orlow?" queried Viazemsky. "Can you not judge by that what is the matter?"

"No. How could I? She still promises to go just the same. As far as words count there is no change. But she keeps putting it off, putting it off. I see her now less and less frequently. She is out when I call. The excuses for not seeing her, for her absences,

are good enough . . . but still now I am beginning to believe that they are excuses. And when I do see her, I feel that she does not wish to discuss the subject, but still fears, for some reason, that it would be unwise to refuse to discuss it, and keeps right on promising to go. What do you think about it, Viazemsky?"

"I think, Orlow, that she's in love with some one else. Not really in love! Love, I suppose, would be the wrong word. Women like her do not ever really love. You could not expect them to, could you?"

"There you wrong her, Viazemsky! You wrong her!" reproachfully.

"I shouldn't be surprised if it were Pushkin, Orlow."

"Nonsense! That useless, drunken, good-for-nothing rhymester? Impossible!" with a shrug of his shapely shoulders.

"Women, you know, Orlow, have liked him."

"I never could understand why, Viazemsky, could you? She is of a different race — class. Besides, a poet is not made to love and live with." Here he smiled a little scornfully and looked across at Viazemsky significantly. "A poet — why, in life — a poet is of just the same use as a curio in one's drawing-room cabinet. My dear Viazemsky, are you accusing her of cultivating a taste for knick-knacks?"

"How low has he fallen, the proud Orlow!" thought Viazemsky, angry that any one should supplant himself in the affection of the friend who was so dear to him. Aloud he remarked:

"You cannot tell just what it is he can give them — which no one else can. No one can guess what dwells in the heart of a woman! Have you not heard any talk — any gossip — about them?"

Orlow shook his head contemptuously. He was confident that there was nothing in it. He was relying, too, upon the usual prerogatives of rank, and the reputation of "the handsome Orlow."

Before Viazemsky could find just what he wished to say in reply to his sensitive friend, he looked up and observed Pushkin standing in the same door by which he and Orlow had just entered. He was pale, distrait. There was something about him

that aroused his compassion. Instantly he regretted that savage article he had published about him in "The Review." There were enough throwing stones at Pushkin, he reflected, without any of his old protectors joining them. He regretted now the words that he could not take back. He cursed mentally the weakness in human nature that inclines one individual to do what another has done. He caught Pushkin's eye. To make amends, and to mollify his conscience which was accusing him, he beckoned him to their table.

As Pushkin threaded his way toward Orlow and Viazemsky on the other side of the room, between thickly placed tables which were now crowded with men, eager, curious eyes followed him, and the casual remarks of both nobles and mercantile people showed how unpopular he had become. Cruel joy crept into the little pig eyes of Benkendorf, who was taking a fleeting inventory of club life for his own personal and private reasons. The joy lingered on to sparkle warmly. When he looked up again from the mug of hot spiced wine which he was sipping, he thought how he hated that man of generous emotions. His eyes followed him as he moved along, with envy, and a persistent longing to destroy.

"Not long — now. Not long!" he gloated. "He has lost the love of the people who shielded him." Members of the rich *bourgeoisie*, whom Pushkin disliked and had treated disdainfully, hastened to remark to each other with a certain amount of cruel satisfaction as their eyes followed the progress across the room of his slight, distinguished figure: "If Ryleiev had not been hanged, and Griboiedov had not been murdered by a religious mob in Persia, either one might have surpassed him. And now there is Gogol."

Some called out insulting questions to him. Others tried to hold him up to ridicule, forgetting as they did so the lightning-like flash of his wit. At the moment when they felt that they had him at their mercy, they did not count upon the tongue that could sting like an adder. A German factory owner who had amassed wealth prodigiously, and whom Pushkin once had snubbed, pulled him by the coat familiarly as he reached the

center of the room, and remarked carelessly, but so that every one could hear:

"They say you resemble the moon nowadays," laughing significantly, "because you shine only by reflected light."

"Well — I shine. Do you?" — not even looking at the speaker who was discomfited by the merriment that followed.

To another, who likewise tried his tongue upon him, Pushkin retorted:

"I see you know me by my voice. I am flattered. I knew you too — but it was by the length of your ears."

His terrible wit had won. But when he triumphed nowadays, it was only for one pitiful, fleeting moment, and the peril of the future loomed rapidly greater. As he retaliated, moving gracefully and nimbly along, insolent, as if he did not care, the power of an unestimated past dazzled and blazed upon the edge of his words like the quick gleam of death upon leaping steel. They hated him afresh for this. Every gain to him now was more than balanced by loss. Benkendorf, who had watched earnestly, estimated this accurately. He began to caress his little white hands.

In the reception of Viazemsky as Pushkin sat down at the table, there was a too swift comprehension, and something that resembled pity. This hurt him more than the barrage of words through which he had just successfully passed. But Orlow was of a different mood than Viazemsky. Unsatisfied love pricked him for the moment, and made him selfish.

"Well, who are you?" he asked, with a little touch of laughing scorn, unusual in him, looking up as if he did not know that Pushkin had been approaching.

"I am a Prince whom God made, not one whom man made," was the proud reply. He would have added had he not known the deep affection which Viazemsky cherished for Orlow: "I do not need to ask who you are. Every one knows. You are Prince of the blond, bastard Orlows, professional lovers of royal women." Since he did not dare say it, he was forced to be content by thinking it, as he took his seat.

To get upon a safe subject quickly and insure the preservation

of peace, Viazemsky began to talk about Bestushew-Marlinsky. He quoted one of the eloquent descriptions of Caucasia in Marlinsky's latest novel.

"I wish I were there with him!" declared Pushkin suddenly with warmth. "I recall now with regret the mountains, at the summit snow-covered, the enamel of flowers at their base. And far, far in the distance — between the mountains — the blue, blazing flash of a sea. I wish I were there!" They both knew, as he spoke, how great was his longing to escape — to get away.

A waiter came to remove the uneaten dinner. Pushkin shoved his chair back a little, in order to give the waiter freer action here where the tables were so crowded. As he did so he saw something shining at his feet. It was a blue handkerchief. He recognized it. He picked it up without the others seeing what he did. It gave forth the French perfume which he had brought home to Natalie Nicolaevna just the night before. Then he heard the indifferent voice of Orlow speaking to the waiter.

"*Garçon* — whose uneaten dinner is this?"

"Baron Heeckeren-Dantes, *Monsieur le Comte.* He seemed ill, or else he was upset about something. He could not eat. I wait upon him, *Monsieur le Comte.*"

Pushkin knew the truth. His wife must have been with Dantes alone, and to-day.

Orlow was replying to Viazemsky:

"My officers tell me that Bestushew-Marlinsky, because of the unfortunate affair of the murdered girl, is seeking death in battle. But he cannot find it. He leads such a charmed life that the bullets cannot touch him. He is the wonder of the army of the South. He emerges from the fray as fresh as from his morning bath. Handsome boy!" murmured Orlow reminiscently, who had held the purely nobiliary title of Lieutenant-General in the Turkish wars.

Viazemsky did not reply immediately. His attention had been attracted by a change of expression upon the face of Pushkin. He had turned suddenly white. The waiter was leaving with the piled-up dishes of Dantes's uneaten dinner. Pushkin took out

his watch. He looked at it nervously. He put it back into his pocket.

"Aren't you going to dine with us?" queried Viazemsky, as Pushkin pushed back his chair abruptly.

"I intended to. But" — rising — "I've just thought of a forgotten engagement. I hope you'll pardon me. I hope you will give me the pleasure another day." He bowed to them both. He turned to go away. His voice had sounded unnatural as if his thoughts had been somewhere else. Now, as he sought hastily the exit in order to get away from the curious eyes which hurt him, he felt just as Alexander used to, that people were making fun of him.

The blue mist, which was the eyes of Old Nesselrode, followed him. If he smiled wisely, it was discreetly. Then he amused himself by meditating upon the fact that great creative artists frequently lead the most pitiful lives. They cannot meet, dominatingly, both art and life. He concluded that it is because they forget self first and then neglect it, which is all that commonplace people are able either to see or to care for. He felt no emotion either one way or the other. The cold operations of the intellect usually sufficed for him. In a crowded supper room there was something about conversationally dull, sleepy-eyed, apparently dreaming, little old Nesselrode, that resembled the will of God; an unseen power which was active, but which few knew how to understand or estimate. He had subtle, devious ways of his own of observing men, and then dominating them. And he was almost always happy.

Orlow was glad that Pushkin was gone. He had felt resentful of his intrusion. Viazemsky had glimpsed grief in the depths of Pushkin's eyes as he left and he was worried. In addition, his conscience pricked him. He tried to console himself by meditating that no one can hold firm social standing here in Peter now. That is, for any length of time — any more than in the Rome of Nero. Then Viazemsky's poet's vision, which he was using more and more seldom nowadays in art, suddenly visualized Pushkin prophetically and sadly — like a symbol; a purple passion flower, pulsing with every breeze, and the gray mist which formed the

background for it was suddenly vitalized into the destructive marching of the great gray armies.

Outside, Pushkin stood alone; sad, reckless, with the discovery he had made. He was undecided. His eyes, which did not see anything, were turned apprehensively toward those cold and disconcerting levels where the polar waters threaten continually the city which pleasure rules.

Inside, Viazemsky was remarking to Orlow: "After thirty, most men become reasonable beings. They are broken to life by that time. They are submissive, and they begin to believe that its ills are either salutary or sent of God. The artist alone does not. That is what is the matter with Pushkin. Did you observe him to-night? He is still swept by emotions. He cannot learn to guide. Do you know, Orlow, I believe that great mental cultivation takes away something of the will to live?"

"All men are restless now," replied Orlow distraitly. He was indifferent to Pushkin, who had never attracted him. "They are full of impossible plans. It is no worse for him, however, than for others."

"That, Orlow, is because they lack convictions. The July Revolution swept away the ground from beneath men's feet. Even statesmen — except Metternich — are so uncertain that there is no one to have faith in. All political policies are unreliable.

"The pagan unrestraint of the century that has just passed met unexpectedly, and all of a sudden, a general demand for material luxuries. The two forces took out their fury in a gigantic upward curve of war. Who can tell what the next curve will mean! To keep up with this material expansion, to make good loss by death caused by the great gray armies, living must be changed, and morals reshaped to meet the future's quick, insistent demand."

"I suppose you believe," laughed Orlow, "that that is why, after wars, men dance and make love?"

"Exactly! I know it. It is the impulse to make good a loss. It is the impulse to create life rapidly. That is what the moralists mean by war depraving youth."

"Wait a moment, Viazemsky," laughed Orlow. "Let me order our dinner."

He signaled the head waiter. He reached for the card. He placed his order, choosing rapidly and discriminatingly the wines they both preferred.

"Morals, my dear Orlow, have nothing whatever to do with good or evil. They are questions of geography, of time. They belong in books of science, not in books of religion! If I am not so happy — living now in this period of change where I cannot settle down to anything — I am glad that I am able to observe it with some degree of understanding."

"But, Viazemsky, of course, I do not pretend to speak as a scholar nor as a man of thought like you — but all countries are not alike."

"No, Orlow! It is true that we are more restless. The reason is because the educated Russian has no inherited prejudices to help hold him steady. A prejudice is a double-bladed sword. If it limits, at the same time it strengthens. Or, if he happens to have prejudices, they may not dominate him because his mind is able to be focussed anywhere at will. It is a universal mind. It is, perhaps, the first example of modern world-mind."

"And then — Viazemsky — there is England! In the midst of the political, the economic upheaval sweeping over Europe, the Englishman still manages — as in that century of passion and self which was the sixteenth century — to keep undisturbed his private life, the quiet and the happiness of his home. The outer world is not permitted to invade it."

"The English mind, my dear Orlow — like the land — is an island." His mouth wore its thin, cruel curve of scorn, as he observed the effect of the remark upon the blond, distinguished Orlow. "The English mind is so made that it sees self with approval. Nothing short of the wrath of God can jar loose an Englishman's belief in the superiority of self. That is the deep, uncrossable ocean of protection that makes his mind an island."

The chameleon-like changing charm of the pure Slav was evident in Orlow as he joined supplely in the laughter of his friend.

"A delightful letter, Orlow, just came from our Minister in Paris, Di Borgo."

"What has he to say?"

"Much! About the nobility since the July Revolution. What do you think they have done? Packed up and left. Paris has become the Paradise of the insolent, up-climbing commoner."

"Where did they go, the nobles?"

"To the country. To the little towns. Here they have set up courts of their own — and of the most exalted etiquette, quite *à la Louis Quatorze*. In the country they are trying to make life the way they want it — the old, gay, dissipated life of the professional beau — *le gant jaune* — *l'élégante* of royal days. With the forced departure of the King, the last hope of the old *noblesse* vanished. Paris, as a city of pleasure, is deserted.

"Now, insists Di Borgo, a tremendous period of action is coming, and with it highly developed powers of mental projection, resulting largely from the mental inactivity of the lower classes whom *modernité* will release and uplift. He calls it a submerging, tidal wave of the masses. This lower-class public — which is going to rule more and more — is not cultivated. Nor is it tender of heart. The old *noblesse* will meet with scant courtesy, not to mention mercy."

"That sounds like Di Borgo! Busy student of social conditions," broke in Orlow.

"He declares" — continued Viazemsky — "that while masters of faith and vision ruled the past, masters of mechanics will rule the future. This will enable — in time — the peasant to play potentate. The old world that is passing made accomplished voluptuaries. It takes centuries to perfect the senses. But the brain can grow up in only a few years.

"The individual is disappearing in the universal. That, perhaps, Orlow, is one reason, feeling as I do, that I have not had the courage to live. Like a rat, I have felt in advance that the ship is sinking. It took a long time to make the rose. It took the harsh, the wasteful discarding by Nature of myriad sub-forms. But the rose can lose its petals in an hour. In the same swift manner, civilization can disintegrate.

"War will be the last savagery for the new civilization to discard and then forget. The strength of a scientific civilization will be expended upon constructive saving. It will steer clear of emotion and destruction. In this change — going forward everywhere — mind (the old decorative mind that loved and created beauty) is passing from the estate of the noble to the estate of the serf. That is just another way of saying that it is pulling off the toga to put on the workman's blouse.

"If the old order was built upon folly and injustice, it served, however, to show to what heights leisure and selection can lift the individual. It showed the possibilities of man. The new order will be built upon reason. It will be built for all. And therefore its progress may be slower."

"A poet is Di Borgo — merely happening to be without the poet's printed books," interrupted Orlow.

Viazemsky went on quoting from Di Borgo, who had spent his childhood as a playmate of the great Napoleon.

"Napoleon was the first astounding example of the upleaping plebeian with the unsated appetite for power of the unfed underling. He could have existed only at a point of time when the doors that closed the entrance to the future were beginning to show a vacillating resistance. From him any dispassionate thinker could have deduced all that has been."

"I should be unhappy, indeed, Viazemsky, if I believed this," said Orlow earnestly. "That makes it a duty to enjoy while we can."

"One of the proofs, Orlow, among many, of the coming of a new civilization is the saving-up in museums of the splendors of the past; rare objects which will not be made again, because the impulse which called them into being will not exist. When the concerted effort of a world is needed for developing the powers of the earth, for increased scientific efficiency, men will not spend years in carving an ivory snuff-box, nor in decorating a tapestry. The individual will be permitted to count only for a concrete gift to the scientifically expanding present. No one will appreciate anything but utility. Fine and sensitive feelings — such as the manor houses of our ancestors sheltered — must go with

the painted treasures. Nobility of soul will not exist. To fill in the vacuum which we have been taught to believe Nature abhors will come a widespread conceit in which each will bravely believe that he possesses within the boundaries of self all desirable qualities. The dull, the æsthetically unproductive underling — well-fed, well-housed, well-clothed — will consider himself poet and prince. The level will be one of stupid, but brave and enduring egotism. That will be the mind of man. The old, rich, resplendent powers of the brain, such as built up the royal dwellings of the Grand Moguls — those pink marble marvels upon the highlands of India — and Venetian palaces, will be temporarily in abeyance, for new ones, different ones, for which the demands of the present are insistent.

"Only a few, perhaps, can see and estimate the change coming over the world. But all can feel it. Not only is the social, the economic, the religious world changing, but art in every department. That is why I am writing less verse now, and more notes of observations of people and of events.

"All things will be different. Nowhere mentally nor physically will man be permitted to feel at home. All the deep grounds of ancient certainty, by means of which for an unfathomable past he has climbed to his present state, are shaking.

"Tender things, such as pity, which have given man courage to suffer, and then have sweetened death, will be exchanged for rough, creative forces in the sharp, brutal focussing of power for a tremendous future — the scientific exploiting of the forces within the earth, for the giving birth, and then the upkeep of the ideal civilization to come, which shall — perhaps — conquer death. So much for Di Borgo.

"When a world begins to store up its impassioned past in museums, it is because of a prophetic fear that the end has come. It means that the background is being built for a different period of time."

"Nonsense, Viazemsky! Mankind has given out too much energy in that prolonged debauch of the senses which was the eighteenth century. That makes its resistance less vigorous. It is ready for the fast." Orlow believed, although he did not

dare say it, that the chief reason why Viazemsky was unable to force life and surroundings into any sort of harmony was because of fear — the shock to the brain of the terrible death of the Decembrists who had been his friends. Viazemsky realized how narrow had been the margin of his own immunity. Orlow knew that he had not been the same since. So he put up patiently with his oddities or else fenced indifferently in words. To himself he made this indulgent estimate:

"Our disagreements are just like our different tastes in wine. He drinks Hungarian *Tokay*, while I want Rhine wine — *Mädchens Milch*. Tastes are points past which reasoning cannot go," observing the two bottles which the waiter had placed upon their table, where their luxurious dinner was progressing course by course.

They began to feel the effect of food well chosen — well cooked. With expanding senses they sipped their wine.

"This delay of Châli's, Viazemsky, is putting me in a peculiarly uncomfortable predicament. Now here is Nicholas on one side all the time urging my departure for Constantinople. You see, he is relying upon me to make headway there against the preponderating influence of England. He believes that I am the only one who can break it."

"Well, why don't you go, Orlow? Any other woman can help you to forget!"

The eyes of Orlow were grieved. This angered the quick-tempered Viazemsky.

"I assure you, Viazemsky, I really suffered from loneliness. And, you see, she keeps promising me all the time. So I keep on waiting day after day. And then consider the help she would be there, knowing language and religion, and having many acquaintances."

Viazemsky understood that Nicholas would put up with Orlow's delay because he was so fond of him. Every one was in the habit of being indulgent with Orlow.

"In addition, Viazemsky, what makes matters worse for me just now, and haste more imperative, is because Nicholas is acquiring the same passion for traveling that Alexander had —

in the last days. You remember, do you not? He is becoming almost as restless! He wants me to hurry back to Constantinople, set things in order there, and then join him for an inspection of the Great Georgian Highway. What do you suppose he plans after that?" — looking trustingly across at his friend.

"How should I know!" a little testily.

"A tour of the Continent — with me for companion. My time with Châli, you see, could only be brief at best."

"Don't be a fool any longer, Orlow! She's nothing but a spy. And this is a mark of unusual honor that Nicholas is showing you."

"You do not understand, my dear Viazemsky. I hate so to think I am growing old. I hate to think that younger men are going to supplant me."

"Tut! Tut!" — his brows drawing together and his gray eyes dark with displeasure.

"I do — Viazemsky!"

"Orlow — there was once a great Roman — whose name was Cicero. He declared he was glad to grow old, because he would be released from passions, and would have more leisure with which to cultivate the powers of his mind."

"But I am not a bookman! I do not know your Cicero. I was taught — as gentlemen are — to duel, to dance, to make love to all pretty women. And to die, if need be, for my Emperor."

As Orlow lighted a Turkish cigar and watched a little sadly its blue ascending ribbon of smoke in the room which smoke made dim, Viazemsky's mocking voice could have been heard saying:

"*Vous êtes un arrièré!*"

"You do not really think, do you, Viazemsky, that it is Pushkin who keeps her from going?" — generously taking no notice of the exclamation which had just called him a back number. Orlow knew, of course, that it was some hindrance that held her, and he could not get at what it was. He was chafing now under the imperious necessity of going. He lighted another cigar too. He puffed away awhile.

"No, no, Orlow! I was hungry. I was just talking" — recalling the expression upon Pushkin's white face as he had left.

Viazemsky believed in his heart that it was Pushkin, but he did not feel like making him any more enemies. In addition, he disapproved of this infatuation of Orlow's. He felt uncomfortable now, at memory of that bitter article he had written. It was unworthy of him. And it was unnecessary. Viazemsky was aware, too, that things were happening so rapidly in Russia, and personal adjustments to political policies and grief for loss by death in the army were so great, that individual wishes necessarily availed less.

"Well" — still attempting to justify himself for the article — "all I can say is that I was sincere in what I wrote about Pushkin." Then he quoted:

Neue Zeiten . . . neue Vögel,
Neue Vögel . . . neue Lieder.
. . . . . .

"*New seasons . . . new birds,*
New birds . . . new songs."

This applied both to love and poetry, and it covered with a soft, blanket mortgage of disguising comfort the wrong he could not now make right.

CHAPTER XXII

CHÂLI

While Count Orlow and Prince Viazemsky were dining luxuriously at the club, coquetting in words with their pet ideas, and deriving the customary amount of consolation from each other's presence, Pushkin was wandering about outdoors in the cold and snow. In the mood of despair that ruled him, he wondered how any one could find courage enough or interest enough in himself or anything else to live on. Life had been hard enough without this — this scandal which, when it burst like a speeding skyrocket, would spread abroad social ruin and disgrace for them both. He did not feel within himself either the mental or the physical strength to deal with the situation or control it. Then he measured, with a mental reversal of his old humorous habit of observation, the garish, uncanny union of his wife's frivolity with the tragic fact that she had met Dantes.

What predicaments necessity forced upon him! In order to preserve existence and even a modicum of freedom at the same time, he had been forced by Nicholas to sign his name to a statement which was a lie. In the dual life which he led and did not know how to stop leading, necessity made him false first to one element of it and then to another. He not only had no mercy shown him, but he was unable to procure justice which the most insignificant are supposed to procure in some degree. Whatever happened he was *hors les lois*.

When he had suffered all that he had the strength to suffer — and he was not made for the martyr's lot — he longed for the soft, swaddling clothes of emotion, to shut it out and make him forget. He longed for warmth. He longed for the seductive sweetness of women, which was the refuge to which his nature inclined him. Now in his melancholy, he was beginning to think that no woman had really loved him for himself alone, except his old peasant nurse. And Châli. *Ah — Châli!* She was back in

Peter now. Blessed thought which brought relief! It was about the hour that she returned from her round of gayeties to dine, or to rest a little before going to bed. He pictured the pleasant sense of protection that had been his while, on the advice of Schukowsky, he had been in hiding in her house. Her servants knew him as one of the family. He would be let in quickly, without question. He signaled an *isvostschik*. He gave gladly the old address.

In the outer hall he took off his overcoat and his gloves slowly and then he waited a little. He did this for the purpose of savoring pleasurably the remembered surroundings. He did this, too, to bathe his senses in the false shimmer of happiness which was so dear to him. Then he advanced to the drawing-room.

Châli — wearing a dress of white silk embroidered in silver, very much like the one in which, once in the past, she had watched with him the waning of the weird daylight night of polar summer — was standing just as he remembered in the old happy days, with her back turned toward him, by the candle.

She was reading a letter from Prince Metternich. In the letter she was procuring, between the lines, the impression that her period of effectiveness with her princely protector might not last much longer. There was no particular reason for this; it was because all things human end. He was married a third time now. She herself was growing older. The political weather was veering toward storms and uncertainty. And nothing, she knew, could check the cold, sure procedures of his intellect.

He had heard of the love of Orlow for her. He discussed it with the impersonality which he would have used for a new plan for rotation of the potato crops — in which he was interested — upon one of his Austrian estates. It insured her future. He hoped that she would like him. To do so would do her heart honor. Indeed, he had always believed that she was capable of a great love. He admired and trusted Orlow, who was his friend. In short, it commended itself to reason. It would make him happy to know that she was safe with Orlow.

He touched subject after subject with his customary light, polished, flippant grace. The letter revealed the scholar, the man of the world, the statesman.

But he was not so happy, she sensed, nor was he so sure of himself and the future. The July Revolution had frightened him, just as it had frightened the rest of the world. It had caused change in all his plans. If he made headway at all, he must be able to tack at the proper moment and then sail against the wind.

The death of Canning — so eagerly hoped for and awaited — had not made life easy. The march of the great gray armies and the iron rule of Nicholas had created a yawning and dangerous chasm between the lower classes and the upper classes, and the influence was being felt in geographically allied lands. Strewn throughout the letter were certain scintillating, semi-scornful, sometimes humorous observations, which he knew her mind would attach to itself as surely as the magnet attaches tiny particles of glittering steel. In one of these — in a discussion of literature — touching here and there with disdain, with humorous contempt, in order to throw a stone at republican-minded French poets, like Hugo, who was scattering dangerous firebrands in song, he remarked:

"A poet, my dear, I wish you to remember, is like a cake that has been made with too many eggs."

This caused her to smile, although she registered quickly the heartlessness of its grace. There was a postscript, as usual, in letters written to her by his own hand. This one informed her gravely that in the midst of private annoyances and public upheaval, he had taken to reading Latin historians, for the mental pleasure of contact with an age that had been firm, and whose mind had not wavered. He thought, perhaps, she might be interested in this quotation from Sallust:

Africa fera et ingrata tellus.

Then he proceeded to translate it for her with some fine and dainty flourishes of his facile pen:

Africa, my dear, it would be well for you to remember, is a wild and uncultivated land.

Carelessly charming; veiled, but containing a warning for her.

Queer how the cold things of the intellect, when flipped at her with a graceful gesture of merry scorn by this practiced hand,

could sting. It was a lash from the little whip of gold with which he managed men. The letters of Metternich had been among her most remarkable experiences. They had built up the life of her mind. They had been an unusual but precious education. Some of the best of himself — best because freest — he had given to her. Yet she gained the impression frequently, when she had finished reading, that he had enjoyed himself prodigiously in the writing; chiefly because she had inspired him to write well. With him, *self*, first and always. She had been merely the *point de dêpart* for exquisite egotism. He had liked her — but it was because she was able to appreciate him. He preferred to conjugate the verb *admire* in the first person, passive voice. It is the business of the intellect, however, she reflected — swinging true at the moment to his teaching — to register facts without emotion. One should not use one's heart in the process any more than a shopkeeper when he counts down change. She smiled at the comparison. Just then a voice called her name.

"Châli!"

In the voice there was regret, despair, and a new note of passion and love. She turned. She saw, to her surprise, Pushkin standing in the door.

"He has come back to me," she thought. "But how worn he looks! Surely now he could belong only to her." That word "Châli" had swept him toward her upon the wings of love and longing. As he was calling her name, she remembered, from some vivid, seemingly alien corner of her brain, a curtain of silk and metal brocade which had hung by a window in the château on Lake Garda, near Verona, where so long ago she had lived with Prince Metternich, in which there was one strand of pure gold that still shone. That was her love for Pushkin. It was the something genuine in midst of the false and heaped-up splendors of her days. Orlow must wait. Orlow must be put off, and he must never know why. This vision-memory was the depths of being projecting automatically before her its prophetic seeing.

Pushkin sank down in a chair with a peculiar movement of exhaustion such as she had never seen in him before. As he glanced at her, when she had seated herself opposite upon a

Turkish divan, he could read in her eyes both pity and comprehension.

"I'm worn out with persecution, Châli! I am worn out with shame — despair. That is why I have come." The words were both an apology and a confession. He sensed sharply as he spoke — and for the first time — the desolation, the breaking-up of life, which his sudden marriage had brought to her. Whenever he saw and understood anything practical relating to himself, it was pretty sure to be too late, he knew.

She was recalling, upon the moment, how when she first looked upon him — so long ago — because he happened to be tawny and colored like the surface of the desert, she had compared him with a lion. The sight of him then had made her vaguely happy by recalling vividly to her years in Africa when love had offered to her youth its most self-forgetful hours. Now, if he resembled a lion, she was telling herself, it was one that was wounded. Again he was speaking, and she knew that it was from an overflowing heart.

"The constant feeling of duty, Châli, of obligation, weighs me down. I cannot get away from it and I cannot get used to it! I feel like a slave. At the same time I wish I were made so I could live up to the demands of duty. I wish I were different! The price of not being different is terrible. I do not know — " solemnly — "how to be a family man."

She had known, of course, that he could not get on in a narrow, domestic atmosphere.

"We are both aliens by blood — you and I. That means we belong elsewhere." She knew suddenly that they belonged together. "The sad skies of your north set me to planning for the future, which easily seems ominous here where there is so little sun. In the south one lives for the moment, one forgets — because life is so satisfying."

Her mind had covered vast spaces of thought while he had been speaking, and she had reached a conclusion.

"I come from the East. Your ancestors came, too, from those same ancient plains where the sun rises — beyond the uncultivated deserts of your Muscovy — and from the hot lands of

Africa. That is why you are undisciplined; that is why you are still an exotic and do not get on." She paused and looked at him awhile in silence before continuing. Then she changed the subject, obsessed by fear.

"There is something that worries me greatly."

"What is it?"

"Nicholas has punished every writer except you. When he is merciful, he is dangerous. If he had punished you, I should feel safe. Personally I feel there is nothing so dangerous as his forgiveness."

"I have thought that too, recently, Châli."

"You must go away. There is no time to lose!"

"It is impossible."

"No, no! I will arrange it. For a space of time, at least, you must be outside the boundaries. Both Benkendorf and Nicholas hate you. They have long been seeking your destruction. The only reason they have delayed is because they fear the judgment of Europe. Now this affair between your wife and Dantes has brought the Ambassador from the Netherlands into the game. He is remorseless, and he is cunning. I know him. The revenge will be for your wife, but the punishment will fall upon you."

"What could I do with Natalie Nicolaevna?"

"Send her — and the children — to one of the estates of your family."

"She would not go! She is made for drawing-rooms —"

"She will have to go. Then you can start south on some excuse or other to pay a visit. Through Orlow I will procure a passport to Turkey — a passport that no one will question — supposedly for some man of my household, but you will use it. Once there, friends of mine will protect you. You will be free! You can do whatever you wish."

"I am worn out, Châli. It is useless to plan anything for me — now."

"Do not talk like that! I refuse to listen. In that pagan soul of yours there is no faith. That is what is the trouble. Faith is needed to live with. Faith, my love, is the only thing that can keep life from falling to pieces. There is no material thing," she

added with conviction, "that is sufficiently cohesive, sufficiently uplifting."

He was amazed at the courage in her heart. In her eyes there was that deep understanding which only the wounds of living can make.

"Wherever you go — I will try to join you . . . But it cannot be now — of course — for the life we once planned. But — *I will go, too.* Destruction awaits you here. That gives you the right to go — the right which is self-preservation. And I am alone!" she added sadly.

She felt akin to him. She vibrated in harmony with him. In her country she had read poets who resembled him. He belonged to that older world of ripened splendor, of cultivation. Here there was only crudeness, cruelty. In the ancient, patient East, with its prodigies of power, there had been poets such as he was. She could understand.

"What if I pray to Allah? There is but one God. He is yours, too. In the constant vexation of your days you have lost sight of too many things that count."

Was this the woman who had been instrumental in so many of the plans of the wily Metternich? Was this the spy who had performed feats of daring in the carrying forward of his delicate, complex designs, who sat here in the silent night of his suffering, talking with him of pity, of faith, of courage? What heights and depths are in the human soul! Was it for herself and her own heart that she was speaking? Or was it as the trained tool of Metternich? Perhaps Metternich thought that an exile from which he would not be permitted to return while Nicholas lived would be good. How could he know? But did it matter in his present straits? It meant happiness in the present and the possible saving of life in the future. Then why not leap upon this blue, enticing wave of hope that was rolling to meet him, and let it bear him wherever it wished. Did he really care greatly where it might be, if only life remained?

"I doubt if I am worth it now, Châli. I think, perhaps, too much of me is gone."

"I cannot bear to hear you talk like that! You have been one

fighting against many. That is the reason. Now they have you down. But when a warrior is defeated in battle, does it mean that he cannot fight again? You know it does not! It means merely that Nature commands rest. That is what you need. Do not be discouraged!

"A little space of freedom from Russia — and its malevolent intrigues — one little week of joy beneath an equatorial sun — the sight, perhaps, of a rare palace, or the scent of some exotic flower under the night — and love, and again you are the world's greatest poet.

"And, if Allah permit me to be with you," she continued in a graver voice and with new dignity, "I shall never know when you grow old. I shall see in you, as when I first met you in the gardens of Bakshi-Serai when the nightingales were singing under the moon, one divinely young, divinely gifted. I shall see in you one who cannot grow old — a chosen one — set high above the masses. You will be king over an unmeasured realm of mind.

"If you go away now, you will recover. You are worn out, discouraged. In another climate, free from annoyances, youth of the mind will bloom within you. You will be born again — creatively."

With her he knew he had felt his supremest moments. With her life had reached its heights. Was there not something sacred in this? Did he not, in a way, belong to her? As he sat there listening to words meant to comfort and invigorate him, countless seemingly alien thoughts and sensations, but which were native to his nature, began to press themselves upon his consciousness; the tantalizing, painful vividness of his peculiar vision which so easily mistakes the unreal for the real, for whom the alluring little is so much. The old love of freedom, of vagabondage, never wholly silenced, revived.

"Remember your own words! Hear what you wrote yourself. She quoted from 'Onégin':

When will they come — those days of freedom,
For which my heart longs bitterly!
When on a ship with white sails swelling
Drift past the shores of Italy?

When with the winds and waters striving,
Down the free pathway of the sea,
May I begin my vagabondage?
Long has the classic land called me!
Oh! might I on blue Adria's waters
Where smiles the southern sun day long,
Might I beneath the Cæsar's heaven
Bemoan our gloomy Russia's wrong!
Land where I lived and loved apart
Until of granite was my heart!

Upborne by the joy, the resonance of his own words, which united him for the moment with his self-willed, rebellious youth, he began to recall the pictures of the Orient which Châli had drawn for him in tone, pictures of its fabulous cities, the dim ports by night, reflecting the sweet but alien stars of an unknown world where in freedom they could live. Why should he not let her save him? Had he not struggled on and suffered sufficiently alone? Where else could he turn for strength and guidance? He knew that for weeks he had longed continually to get away. Now he began to forget a little, he began to dream of that vagabond existence which was the only one that suited him, and the delights of its irresponsible freedom.

There was something about her that gave life to his fancies, just as his wife dulled them. Her words, her gestures, even her motionless silence, opened before his sensitive brain avenues of vision. It made him almost happy, in this moment of relaxing grief, to think that he could never guess what gift of thought she would bring. His grieved and wounded senses drank in greedily again the memories of her which he had stored up; the unnamable hue of the gauzes she had worn, her faint, tingling, Eastern perfumes, her habit of sitting motionless for long periods like a statue of prayer. These memories helped correct the dismal, dull, military world Nicholas had conjured into existence. The expression upon her face of gravity and sweetness helped to steady him. She moved the depths of being. She called to that which was powerful and genuine in him, and which was hidden behind the barriers of environment.

"I realize, Châli, how weak, how wrong it was for me to come here to-night. But I thought that, despite what I have done, I could not give you up. I do not know how to live without this vigor, this momentary calm that come from contact with you. It is the only realizable asset in my grief and confusion."

What touched her most was the absence of the merry scorn which had characterized him.

"But do not think I am as selfish as I may be weak. I know why Orlow ran away from Constantinople. I know that it is best for you to accept his protection. I know that it is best for you to go with him because it means a future safe and luxurious. Do not let me stand in the way!"

"The pressing need now is to save you," she replied.

He arose wearily, but as if with a gesture of assent.

"Shall I procure the passports from Orlow?"

He hesitated a perceptible moment before replying.

"Yes, get them! For once — just for once — I will be free!"

In his eyes there was the longing to go. In his eyes she saw the look she knew, as if he were visioning some far, some delightful future. For the moment she felt that he was in accord with her. He lifted her hands with a touch of the old gallantry. He kissed them both with the tender, the caressing gesture which at first had surprised her in the savage Pushkin. How dear, how companionable he was!

Then she began to feel vaguely, as they stood there so happily side by side, that, mentally, he was even now beginning to slip away from her. The mere vision of the things he wanted sufficed for his slender poet's butterfly-need that seldom reached reality, that seized and held nothing. It was just the same sensation the friends of Alexander used to have, something psychic, something inexpressible. Sadly she measured how he who could enrich facts with the glamour of words could not estimate them in their practical relations. And she who could measure the great ideals that swept futilely now across his brain knew that he was just as reckless with his life as with his genius.

If she could only believe that he was hers again.

"There — where we are going — when you are free and out of

the country, you will throw off, like a disused cloak, this grief which is destroying you. There, in another country, you will become virile, strong, what you were meant to be, what you were when I first met you — a god in his youth in the dawn of world-making."

CHAPTER XXIII

NATALIE NICOLAEVNA

Buoyed up by the clearness of vision and the temporary strength of will which had resulted from the visit to Châli the night before, with hope resurrected again and shining dimly, even if in the distance, Pushkin made up his mind to have a talk with Natalie Nicolaevna. He had put it off too long now, he knew. Perhaps he could get her to leave the city for a while, perhaps he could hit upon some plan for their united well-being.

He told himself that the reason he had been drifting with the current so long, without trying to oppose it or to save himself, was because he was worn out with grief, worn out with long nights of gambling, with forced and hurried work by day in order to meet bills which pressed continually. He knew there had been neither plan nor logic in his life. There had been only a sort of helpless confronting of ruin. He kept telling himself that it was merely bodily weariness instead of weakness of nature. But now, he would try to guide. Long enough he had let things take their own course. Dazzled by the visions that floated through his brain, he knew that he did not always estimate correctly a length of time that had passed.

He saw now, just as Châli had pointed out, that the death-net of the great gray spider, Nicholas, who had been successful in despoiling Russia of its men of genius, was drawing about him closer and closer. If he could get away from Russia, even just for a time, perhaps he could collect his strength sufficiently to escape it. Anyway, he could lay aside this perplexing misery and see calmly. He could create again.

Wearing that brown velvet dressing-gown that so offended her, his bare feet stuck into slippers, he set out in search of Natalie Nicolaevna. Upon the threshold of her private room, which she insisted upon having heated to the temperature of a hot-house, he paused. There she sat — and oblivious of his presence. She

looked — he knew prophetically at that moment — just like the enchanting paintings which Greuze had made of the child-wife who used to deceive him so, in the famous studio in Versailles. Hastily wrapped about in a blond lace negligee, which she had flung on over her nightdress, her bright curls bobbed up upon the top of her head, shining and rosy from her recent bath, she was sitting by the window under a gilded cage which held a yellow bird. She was playing with bits of bright-colored ribbons, bits of silk and velvet — samples sent from the manufacturing centers of Europe — to facilitate sales in Russia where women dressed so extravagantly. Her face was happy. She was absorbed in a preferred pastime.

He envied her her mediocrity, he knew, as he stood there looking at her. For her nothing existed beyond new dance steps and a change in fashions. Yet in his heart there was a peculiarly complex feeling for this pretty, peace-disturbing woman. It was something that was akin to pity for her who caused confusion continually.

The sudden sun made the window beneath which she sat blaze out a dazzling, diamond square aided by the sparkling snow outside, and sending the happy little yellow-throated bird in his cage of gold into ecstasies of song. He felt at that instant that he must look like an ugly monster beside such youth, beside such bloom. She made him appear older than he really was. He felt now that other people must see it, too. They must remark about it. He observed himself in a way in which he was still astonished to find himself forced to observe.

"Natalie Nicolaevna!"

She looked up. He fancied that her face clouded.

"Well — *mon nègre?*"

"I want to talk with you."

She waited a long time before she replied.

"Are you not going to ask me in?"

A pearly white arm of satin emerged gracefully from the blond lace and pointed carelessly to a chair. He drew it up opposite her. He took a seat.

"You do not seem glad to see me."

"Of course not — *mon nègre!*"

"Why?"

"Do I not know that when you say you want to talk with me it means something disagreeable?"

How kind even the physical facts of life had been to her, he thought on a sudden, forgetting his words, and seeing her in the sharp, revealing sunlight of morning. Even child-birth had neither marred her nor made her look older. No matter what happened, she remained the fresh, unspoiled rosebud of spring. She possessed some striking immunity to sorrows of the flesh. She was never ill. She was seldom weary, and she had no nerves. An unsparing revelation of mind told him that she lived below the level of suffering. This was the artist's inspired seeing. It was forming now the dull, hidden accompaniment to his speaking. But it was difficult to begin. He disliked greatly to disturb the present simulated peace. He hoped the scene would be as little violent as possible.

"Darling child — I want you to listen . . ."

"*Ah — ha!* I knew it was going to be disagreeable!"

"We must talk together occasionally, must we not?"

"Not to-day — I haven't time."

"You never have any time for me. It is hard for you to grant me a moment. You are more difficult of approach than Her Majesty. You are either just going somewhere, or else you are just coming back. If you happen to be at home, your admirers are here."

"What do you expect of a professional beauty? Do I not keep you in the Court Set?"

"When can I talk with you, Natalie Nicolaevna?" ignoring her former question.

"How do I know! This afternoon — I go to the lace exhibit at Princess Woronzow's. It's for charity. Can I miss it? To-night — a ball. Is it not my duty to look my best?"

She recalled just then something that Dantes had said: "Why did you marry that old fool?" She looked across at him with bright, critical eyes. How unlike dark, svelt, graceful, merry Dantes, who dressed in the extreme of fashion! To her surprise

he looked older than he did just a little while ago. He looked broken-down, and frail. How unlike he was to that delightful man Dantes, who amused her so!

"Darling child — are there not things more important?"

"That is not the question! When you are in a bad temper, you want everything to stand still."

"Are you not jesting?"

"I wish I were!"

"What do you mean, Natalie Nicolaevna?" surprised at the bitterness.

"This!" waving a dimpled hand to embrace the room.

"This what?"

"This — can't you see? This shabby, this cheap room —"

"Natalie Nicolaevna, I do not catch your meaning."

"I wish it were a jest — all this cheap and shabby life — here with you."

He winced. His sensitiveness made him more easily the victim of the inequalities of his position. He registered accurately the unfortunate *milieu*, but he was incapable of changing it, of making headway against it. With a woman like her to live with there was no way to stabilize life without money. Her folly — her extravagance — And money he did not have. He could not buy her the things that would make her happy. And he could not meet her childish merriment. That youth, which in her had so charmed the artist in him, he could not imitate. But Dantes could, Dantes was her natural mate. Because he did not reply as promptly as usual, Natalie Nicolaevna was vexed. Her voice began to show it, in the little banner of triumph which fluttered from the edge of her words.

"You should see the apartment Monsieur Dantes furnished for me!"

He could not believe his ears. He was stunned. He was dazed. At length he was able to command his voice sufficiently to request her to repeat. She repeated it just as she would any statement.

"Then you did go to meet him?"

His voice was so dull and strange he could not recognize it. He knew, of course, the truth before he asked the question. The

handkerchief he had found at the club with the perfume on it he had bought the night before proved it. And there was an anonymous letter in his pocket at the moment that told it all.

She nodded. She met his eyes, laughing and triumphant.

"Where is it . . . this — *this* — *apartment?*"

Unhesitating, still looking at him with limpid eyes, she gave him the address.

"You should see it — you who do nothing for me. The money — expended. The luxury. There rosebuds are kept always, in memory of me." She described the pictures from France in their gold, bow-knot frames; the embroidered, blue-satin hangings, and her child's voice grew merry and mischievous as she described how he had waited and waited, and she did not come. Then she went on to tell him of the anger of Dantes, and how he was grieved and shaken, how both his voice and his hands had trembled, and how it had all amused her when she refused to stay for dinner. She looked upon this merely as a new kind of bouquet thrown at her vanity.

"Why did you go, Natalie Nicolaevna?"

She remembered that that was just the same question Dantes had asked her, and she longed to laugh. Before she replied, she held up a sample of pale-blue brocaded silk-velvet from Switzerland and looked at it critically against the light. Then she put it down, away from the other samples, to signify that she had selected it, and turned to answer him.

"It was the first real cold day, Alexis Sergiewitch. You know how warm the autumn has been! It was really the first chance I had had to wear my new furs. Do you want me to go and get them and show them to you now? The coat is splendid — for me. Lined with dots of blue, of silver, embroidered upon white satin. Shall I get it?"

"Why, Natalie Nicolaevna, did you not stay . . . *for dinner* — as he expected?"

It was becoming increasingly difficult for him to control his voice.

"I wanted others to admire my new furs, too! I drove on to the Princess's to have tea. Shall I bring the coat out now to show to you?"

A queer sound escaped from Pushkin. It resembled a little the cry of a wild animal that has been wounded unto death. It was something inarticulate, something that could not be worded in him who had such power of words.

She looked across at him a little curiously. She had thought for a long time that he was queer.

No one was true to him. Like lightning his brain registered fact after fact, linking up the present betrayal with the past. What did Fate leave for him to have faith in? His wife had met Dantes in a rented apartment, but only as a child playing hide-and-seek with a chosen companion, for the pleasure of being admired in a new fur coat. Of love, of passion, she had no comprehension. She had really had a better time in this truthful, triumphant telling than when she had met her lover. He was sure that she had concealed nothing. Her eyes were frank and clear.

He knew that, as he had been listening to her — and the humorous incongruity of the situation struck him sharply — what had really wounded him so in this astonishing confession, which his own ears could with difficulty believe, was that she could not sin because there was nothing in her. It was this that hurt. Even in the prose tales he had just been writing, he had never been able to hit upon any such a situation as this. Her folly had surpassed his imaginative inventiveness. Inability kept her forever outside the boundaries of sin and punishment.

He felt strike himself suddenly — but as it were turned inside out, something become stark, terrible as a skeleton — that old power of mirth which had been one of his inheritances from his merry mulatto mother, and which he used to turn relentlessly upon others. Now it was turned upon him. He saw it without a trace of self-pity. He registered all its cruel uniqueness, but he felt at the same time bubbling within him the shivering laughter of tears. To Natalie Nicolaevna, who looked up suddenly from the assortment of silk and velvet samples with which she was so busy, because he had not spoken for so long, he looked crumpled. To her, more and more, in light of the ideas Dantes was pouring into her head, he was becoming a figure that was merely funny.

From the blur of misery certain single thoughts broke loose, de-

tached themselves, and staggered upward. He knew suddenly that it was love that had been lacking in his life — love which simple peasants can procure, and which strengthens and guides. Then he found himself in the extraordinary position of envying dull Nicholas his happy home.

He fancied that he and his wife had been shunned somewhat lately. The news of Dantes's extravagant furnishing of the apartment probably had got abroad, and with it the report that Dantes had ruined himself for her. Scandalous stories, of course, were being whispered. He fancied that he had seen scorn, merriment, disdain, in the eyes of people. He fancied that men alone now followed the lovely woman who bore his name.

"You probably do not stop to think of the disagreeable things I have to put up with since I married you," she began, observing the dazzling light that was beating through the window, glorifying penetratingly the fine lace that covered her arms and shoulders, making her restless, and enticing her to activity in the gay world without.

He looked up.

"At balls when the carriages are called and your name is heard, they say, 'What Pushkin?' Then some one answers: 'Pushkin, the poet.' You should hear the contempt with which it is uttered. Do you think it is pleasant for me when your name is called to step forth and go out to a hired carriage like a servant-maid?"

Forgetful of self, and grandly conscious of her helplessness, he cried: "Darling child — darling child — I am trying to watch over you! I am trying to guard you in this lascivious city that laughs away the lives and the reputations of women. Can you not believe it? If it should be generally known that you met Dantes, you will become an outcast. I know, of course, you did no wrong!"

"His Majesty approves of me," she replied with fresh anger.

He could not tell her, because she could not comprehend, that the Emperor's approval was merely part of the crushing system which was going forward which would result in the ruin of them both.

"Little one — you know nothing of this world of court and intrigue. You are too young to know. The very fact that Dantes is a foreigner must count against you. If you had been guilty and had really taken a lover, and he had been pure Russian, a nobleman approved by the Court Set, you might have escaped — perhaps. The best thing now is for us both to go to the country awhile."

"The country!"

She swept the bits of gay color into a rainbow whirl upon the floor. She forgot the blue velvet sample which she had selected with such care against the light.

"*The country* — in winter? I will not go!"

"Put away your anger. Understand how I am trying to save you."

"With my new furs? With the evening gowns which I have not worn even once? Buried — *in the country* — with the height of the season ahead!"

He knew, of course, that life for her meant the flattery of society. But he did not know that she had such strength to rebel. Then he tried to recall, in order to comfort himself a little, the vision of resurrected power and happiness which Châli — the night before — had conjured into being before his weary mind. It resembled the indestructible happiness which is promised by life after death. He tried to cling to it. He tried to summon the strength to follow it. In a voice that was firmer, he replied:

"Natalie Nicolaevna, in this you will be guided by me. We will leave the city, and just as soon as it can be arranged. Until we do leave" — with a flash of anger that infuriated her — "remember this: Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes cannot enter the house. Likewise, I forbid you to be seen dancing with him, or to be in his company. I am master here!"

The tone had grown savage.

She arose. Anger met anger. She was outraged, that this poor poet whom she had made such a mistake in marrying should dare address her like this.

"I will do as I please. Besides — who gives us our position? Is it you or is it I?"

He felt again the bubbling of that shivering laughter, which was so much sadder than tears.

"Other men praise their wives for nothing at all. You blame me for my good qualities. You are angry because people admire me. You are just as wrong as that in everything. What do I not put up with! Shabby living . . . constant lack of money . . . I will go to Katarina's room! There you cannot follow me. My sister Katarina's room is the only place where I am safe and happy."

"Natalie Nicolaevna!" he called as the door slammed. "*Natalie!* —"

With a sudden leap the sparkling snow-light outside flooded the room again. It was like the bursting of a wide-rayed sun. In his swinging golden cage the bright, yellow-throated bird, after pecking busily at his proud feathers, swelled his bubbling throat and shattered the silence with song. The sweetness, the light, in their intensity made him suffer. The light, the song, were like the last grand gestures of joy which were casting him off. He felt that he was losing sight of the strength, the calm, which Châli had attempted to give him back. He lost sight of the self which she had shown him beneath the false veneer of civilization.

He did not know how long he sat there, without seeming to possess the motive power to move. He lost sense of time. Then he knew sadly that that brilliant square of diamond sparkling light which hurt him so, and the shrilling voice in the cage of gold, reached the same superb height as that glorious forgotten youth of his when Russia had been merely the background for his exploits, and the winds of Russia merely a medium to bear abroad his songs.

CHAPTER XXIV

NICHOLAS

In his sumptuous private sitting-room in the Winter Palace, one of the few rooms his hobby for simplicity — which was one of the accompaniments of his harsh, dry nature — had not despoiled of luxury, Nicholas had just taken tender farewell of the Empress, although she was merely setting out for the usual round of gayety. Since the close of the Turkish and Persian wars, Nicholas had thought it wise to establish as close social relations as possible with the nobility. Nicholas remained at home only in response to urging and the command of his physician. He was suffering from influenza. He had fever. He looked white and shaken. To yield to illness, however, was in his opinion a weakness on the same level as yielding to licentiousness. A person with will and a certain respect for duty did not do such things. He was dressed as carefully as for a court ball. His waist was swathed until it resembled the waist of a débutante. To the eye he was faultless. In a gold and velvet embroidered chair, he sat erect and stern. Despite the fact that he shivered continually, he would not approach the fire. To crouch over the fire, to stretch out one's hands luxuriously to it, savored of that sensuality he detested. It was a slight bending of the proud personal will.

Count Benkendorf entered. Nicholas could not afford to waste time. The Count came in flexibly submissive and fawning. He likewise was in full court dress. Knowing his Royal Master's hobbies he seated himself as far as possible from the fire. He did not inquire for his sovereign's health because his sovereign could not be ill. He was superior to imperfections.

Benkendorf gave Nicholas the same kind of comfort that the fire might have given him on this bitter night of cold and illness if he had permitted himself to approach it. He liked the mere presence in a room of this man whose nature was like flexible steel concealed beneath velvet. They hid nothing from each other, these two. They conversed in confidence.

They discussed first the letters reaching Peter so regularly from Count Pozzo Di Borgo, Russian Ambassador in Paris. Benkendorf disdained the gossip that Di Borgo was in the pay of England. That renowned soldier of fortune had worried them both by declaring that now France was sweeping on with the velocity of a torrent toward some tremendous social destruction. The letters were filled with political forebodings. Di Borgo even thought that the end of monarchy might be in sight. Life was hard for him in Paris now because there was a constant swaying to and fro of ideas caused by the old going, the new coming.

Then Benkendorf pointed out to allay his sovereign's worry that it was Di Borgo who was keeping even a semblance of amity between Nicholas and the new French ruler, Louis-Philippe. He kept insisting that he was the best possible man for Paris, because, in addition to his fine mind, he had such personal charm. He succeeded in allaying his sovereign's fear on this score.

They discussed next a particularly bitter but brilliant article which Herzen had written in the safety of exile where Nicholas could not get at him. They both agreed that Herzen's prose had all the brilliant color of the Latin mind. But Benkendorf was able to make the private observation that these articles by daring young Slavic exiles now wounded Nicholas, where before they had merely angered him.

After this, the subject of the Moscow journalist came up. He was a friend of Pushkin, and his name was Chaadaiev. He had lived abroad a good deal. He had learned to know German philosophers in Germany, and in France he had been influenced by the teachings of Lamennais. He was an aristocrat and a man of powerful personality. His offense was a piece of writing not meant for publication. It was called "A Philosophic Letter." But it had been circulated widely. It had caused too much comment and had aroused partisanship. As a piece of writing, it was original, alluring, and memorable. Nicholas was deeply offended. Benkendorf knew the subject would be threshed over and he was ready for it. He had his plan. He had tried so many of his plans that he felt he could trust their serviceableness.

While his sovereign had been discussing the offending letter,

his gray speckled pig-eyes took on the warm, amber glow of coals, or of autumn leaves. His fat body became soft, sensuous, with the voluptuous joy of anticipated cruelty. When he spoke, as His Royal Master paused and looked at him expectantly, it was almost in a whisper.

"We will not punish, Your Majesty. That is —"

Nicholas waited.

"Your Majesty," in a whisper, "we will sympathize with him — because his mind is unsound."

The wide blue eyes of Nicholas darkened with comprehension.

"Your Majesty — we will put him in an asylum . . . far away . . . some lonely place . . . where no one will ever look upon his face again. Whenever his name is mentioned, Your Majesty, we will both express our sympathy."

How reliable was Benkendorf! With what skill he had been able to solve the problem which had confronted him. He did not praise him, however. He said nothing. The silence lasted long enough for the idea to be thoroughly digested by Nicholas, who understood that it meant the safe putting away of another troublesome young man who helped keep Russian minds in a ferment.

When Benkendorf spoke again, it was evident that his happy mood was still upon him.

"Your Majesty will graciously remember that when once in the past we discussed that poet, Pushkin, my advice to Your Majesty was: Pardon — and crush."

"Yes, yes, Benkendorf. Yes, yes! But God knows that I would rather pardon if I had only myself to consider. It is only duty to my country that would force me to punish" — sensing as he spoke another marvel of revenge from the resourceful man opposite and hastening hypocritically to cross himself and to disclaim guilt on his part. Benkendorf understood perfectly. He measured accurately the chasm between deed and word. He knew that Nicholas found the same pleasure in cruelty that he himself found. It was one of the strong, invisible fibers that formed their mental union. The whispered voice of Benkendorf

that began speaking now had tremendous restraint of vibrations beneath it:

"Your Majesty — there is not long to wait."

Nicholas looked at him. Instantly his face became intent.

"Your Majesty — Pushkin is in the position of the dazed tormented bull in the ring. The crowd are hectoring and cheering now while he charges madly on to death."

He waited for his words to be fully felt by the slower mind he was addressing. His throat felt dry. He hesitated a moment in order to wet his lips with his tongue.

"Your Majesty — he is blind now . . . he is staggering . . ."

Again the little red dot of his tongue flecked nimbly the edge of his lips. There was a quality about the stillness that instantly enveloped Nicholas, that informed Benkendorf just how greatly his sovereign was pleased. In the stillness, so dramatic because the statement had been so bitterly awaited, the grouped candles in their shining holders of crystal gave forth jets of light — like the dull senseless laughter of inanimate things.

In this plan which Benkendorf had been perfecting so slowly it seemed to him that he could see now the poetry of crime. Practice was evidently developing his natural powers. It amused him to think that he, Benkendorf, had taken to poetry, while Pushkin, who was a poet and who had always disdained him, had been forced to turn to the prose of words and the prose of life.

"Admirable!" he declared in silent self-approval. "Admirable!" The radiance of his mood matched the sparkling candles.

Next he tried to make Nicholas believe that the murder of Capo D'Istria, the old boon-companion and the friend of Di Borgo, who by the aid of Nicholas had been made President of the Seven Islands Republic in the Ægean, had not been a slap at Russia. He was not so successful in this.

"You see, Benkendorf," Nicholas objected, "the crowd waiting at the door to murder him declared they did it because he was no longer a Greek patriot, but, instead, a great Russian noble. That is defiance flung at me."

"They had to say something, Your Majesty! They had to shield themselves!"

"Of course, of course," impatiently. "But can't you see that does not explain it?"

"I should not be surprised if those words had been reported falsely. To Your Majesty, however, who lives in the fear of God, wrong done is right in disguise."

Nicholas and Benkendorf bowed their heads and crossed themselves.

"Your Majesty, they were not ready — the Greeks of the Islands — for the wisdom of Your Majesty's guidance."

"God is my witness, Benkendorf, I live only for others."

"Orlow, on his return to Constantinople, can look into the matter. Your Majesty can rely upon Orlow."

"But Orlow is delaying his return, Benkendorf, and with our tacit permission. Orlow is sad because he is lonely."

The level voice of Nicholas had changed a little. He thought of his own happy home which Orlow did not have. Nicholas was faithful to his friends, and he pitied him.

"Perhaps she will go with him," ventured Benkendorf.

"She may," assented Nicholas.

"Whatever Orlow does, we can trust him," added Benkendorf, arising and rubbing his little white hands with a swiftness which measured his happiness. And when he went out the door, after saluting his sovereign with proper humility, he moved as nimbly as his short fat legs would permit.

Nicholas, however, was not so happy. Slight individual instances, like those he had just discussed with Benkendorf, might be as he wished. But with great, with universal plans he was meeting defeat. Outside of Russia he confronted a restless and unsettled Europe. The old ally of his country — Metternich, — was growing weary in the long battle to which he had devoted his life and his strength. Metternich was growing old, too. He complained more than ever. He was not finding the usual amount of diversion in love.

England, to be sure, was not so formidable. He had outwitted her diplomatically, and he had outplayed her in the East. She had been burdened heavily with the wars which he had started. And she had a group of serious political ills at home. He disliked England for her inclination to meddle in Eastern affairs.

He could see corruption of all kinds throughout society. Since the marching of the great gray armies, cholera had broken out in various cities. And the plague. There had been popular uprisings. There had even been socialistic demonstrations. Not only in great Novgorod in the interior, and Sebastopol, where such things had happened before, but in other cities of the interior. Crime had increased. Independent and unattached ills had made their appearance. His Polish subjects, governed by his older brother, Constantine, had disgraced him. They sympathized openly with France in revolution. They drove his brother from the palace, and then they threatened his life. Bands of brilliant young Polish exiles, such as Adam Mickiewicz, Julius Slovacky, young Count Krasinski, had fled to Paris which protected and pensioned them, and which, in their return of gratitude, they dubbed, *The Step-Mother of Genius*. His young Russian subjects were there with them. They were flinging brick-bats at the Royal Family. They were inciting Poland to revolution. Paris had never been so brilliant as it was now, with the bubbling anarchy of the Slav mind. As pretense for revolution, Poland demanded that Russia give back the Lithuanian Provinces.

He, Nicholas, did not reply. A sovereign may not argue with a rebellious subject. He summoned Paskievich from Caucasia and the East. This left again to Woronzow the duty to hold that country safe for the Crown. He sent Paskievich to Warsaw. And in his personal letter to Paskievich he recalled to that general's mind the words of Napoleon, that it was easy enough to conquer a Polish army, but not a Polish woman. He took time to warn him that they are the most fascinating, the most dangerous, in the world. "Beware of women," he wrote, but, remembering in the same letter his greed, he made him Field-Marshal of the armies of Russia.

He ordered him to show no mercy. He ordered him to subdue Poland at any cost, and with all speed. He who could resist the arms of women could not resist the greater voluptuousness of blood. War began. It did not last, however. Soon a message came from Paskievich which Nicholas considered the proper message for a general to send his sovereign. It read: "Warsaw

lies prostrate at the feet of Your Majesty." The messenger returned with the announcement that Paskievich had been made the Prince of Warsaw. Again that military genius had spread about him a peace which was silent — although revengeful. The clarions shrilled no more. The flags were furled.

Nicholas arose and began to walk back and forth upon rugs so deep, so soft, the footfall made no sound. Physically he was the ideal of a Muscovite Czar. To-night, however, his face was white. It wore a strained look. In his eyes, for the first time, there was an expression that recalled, just a little, the visionary. He had reached a most disturbing conclusion here alone in the night. It was not royal blood, it was not his own ability, but the strong hand of Paskievich — whom he warned continually against women — that kept him safe and upon the throne.

Now, since the fall of Warsaw, they were singing ribald songs about him in the streets of Paris. He had become something of an object of ridicule there. Some of the most brilliant minds in Europe were making fun of him. They were nicknaming him the "*Don Quixote Czar*," because he sought so busily for something to battle. But wise old Nesselrode was afraid of peace. What could he do? Little old Nesselrode kept declaring that the only way to carry on at all was by war. His hand was being forced by circumstances. He had seen it, too, when Nesselrode pointed it out, remarking: "When the adjusting comes, with peace — no knowing who may have to go." He had felt at the time that old Nesselrode had stressed the *who*. That little sentence, spoken so softly by his subtle Chancellor, had given him the shock of his life. "Be careful," was old Nesselrode's final admonition, "of the dangerous restorative of calm! When minds are released from danger, from war, even I could not guess what might happen." Nesselrode, just on this account, was urging another campaign in the East now; this time against the Khan of Khiva.

Assuredly Nicholas was no longer happy. Like Pushkin, he had been learning the meaning of fear, although he would never admit it. As is the case with people who have no imagination, and a nature like his, he feared the things he could not see: thought, the workings of mind. The fate of his brother had taught him to fear

the artist's creative power which was active throughout the Continent. He disapproved of the peculiar kind of mental restlessness of young Russians. They were bored. They were disenchanted. If not, their minds were filled with impossible plans. They were subtle, versatile, unstable. Among the rich who did not happen to be interested in sociology, vice was threatening to become a disease.

He feared most, perhaps, the rippling songs of Pushkin. He saw in them the spirit of revolution, made rhythmic, and thereby memorable. He believed it was the music with which the oncoming, defiant masses of the future would keep step.

The laughter of Gogol he feared, too. If it was a different kind of defiance, it was just as genuine, and it was one that was harder to deal with. The word-charm of these two men was a stirring of free life he hated. Their charm was danger, sugar-coated.

The year 1830 had brought many changes, he reflected. No revolution alone had come then. In that year the age of epigram had closed and diplomatic wit began. Then diplomatic wit faded with the passing of the gifted statesmen who had been able to wield it. Now governments were being pelted with anonymous denunciations in just the way Pushkin was being pelted. Recently one of these had reached him. It read: "Arise, Russia! You who are eaten up by enemies and destroyed by slavery! Bow your head in the dirt! Bow your head and beg the forgiveness of your people! For you there will be no other way." This reminded him of the youthful writing of Pushkin. He kept thinking that perhaps Pushkin was at the bottom of it.

The Great Revolution of long ago was the first time that man had thought of justice as anything applicable to life; anything but a dream. Now there had been another revolution, and the circumference of that little word had expanded alarmingly. It had become the outer rim of an ocean of vast extent, sweeping onward with the power of a tidal wave, and threatening to engulf him.

Nicholas knew that the generous nature of his brother had failed. He determined to be just the opposite. His nature, too, inclined him this way. And now, just as the victories of Paskievich in the south and east had made him feel secure, the

Revolution of July in France came. He and his spies performed wonders in the length of time they withheld the news from Russia. In the excess of his rage, when at length he could hold out no longer and it became generally known, he declared the French flag should not enter a Russian harbor. But he had been forced to eat his words. He admitted ships floating the tricolor. Like his brother Alexander, therefore, whose weakness at Verona he condemned, he stood convicted of a lie before Europe — he, Nicholas, stainless servant of God. He was never more surprised in his life. And now he was forced to receive — no matter how disdainfully — the new Ambassador from France, Baron de Bourgoing.

In short, he saw that the forces he fought were crawling in upon him. They were the inescapable tides. He saw, too, that the slow, incoming ocean was limitless — submerging — and nothing short of God Himself could stop it. He never admitted it save to himself. But he suffered. He suffered just as his brother had suffered. Only he did not possess his brother's noble, spiritual escape. He could not comprehend that victory can be only in renunciation. He knew now — without a shadow of doubt — that if he lived long enough this incrawling ocean of change and time would be under his feet. It would uplift him as the tides uplift the polar ice-flow. Then, perhaps, it would sweep him away. And if it did, whither?

He was awakening from that dangerous drunkenness caused by the wine of unlimited power. Up to the year 1830 he had grown increasingly arrogant, increasingly conceited. It was a difficult right-about-face to make, especially since the march of the great gray armies had frightened Europe.

Life was bending him to its demands just as it was bending Pushkin. He, the proud, the superior, the strong, the unyielding, must fall in step with the procession like any other convict of time. While he felt that he was doing his duty, while he still believed that he was right, at the same time he was helpless to turn in the direction he wished the mind of a world in revolt. It was like issuing a *ukase* to stop the coming of summer.

Another civilization was on the wing, in which he would be as

useless, as out of date as the Temple of Luxor. Like Luxor, history would mention him because of his size, his expensiveness, and his isolation. He would become a none too revered object of curiosity.

The wind of revolution, bitter, penetrating the marrow of life, was blowing away derisively the old. He was merely a royal beggar, clutching closer about him his rags, in order to cover his nakedness; trying pitifully to hold them a little longer, beaten upon continually by rough winds of time.

His fears — as he paced this sumptuous room alone in the night — were acquiring accelerated life. He did not know the surging mental terrors of Alexander, because he did not have his artist's nature, nor his sensitive responsiveness to surroundings. But there were in evidence facts enough now to do without that glittering firefly of the mind. A gradual change was setting in in men's thinking processes. As he looked at them independently, one by one, without the power, however, to focus into æsthetic unity — to realize as an organized continuity — he knew he did not like them. But — grand, terrible, uncompromising, — he would face them. He would meet what came. He would ask no quarter. He would never yield.

Nicholas was not a scholar. He had read little. He was not a man of imagination. Yet — plainly — he could see the change that was coming, the change most to be feared by his class; the passing of the aristocrat.

Although it had not been intended that he should rule, and therefore he had had no training, he had learned in a certain degree — as do all — from life. And without being thinker, dreamer, or scholar, he could look back across the bold and well-known landmarks of history — such as even the uneducated know — and catch glimpses of the disappearing phantoms of prodigious civilizations, which had perished, and whose fabulous names came echoing prophetically to him to-night. With these civilizations, Gods had perished, and laws. There were the haunting old Assyrian civilizations, upon the level of the plains. There was Greece. Later there was Rome. Civilization had never seemed more sure of never changing, nor had man been happier or

more contented in his everyday life and affairs, than under the Antonines. From that happiness, that security, there was only a slight space of time to the crash. And then there followed the slow Dark Ages when the mind of man all but died.

There was Egypt. Who could put the proud finger of his scholarship, his trained perception, upon the plague-spot that caused dissolution, the swift crumbling away to dust, to the mute agony of painted temple and twisted gold, of that superfine cultivation in the fecund valley of the Nile! One day — with its blue carven lapis, its bristling pink lotus-flower towers of stone, immovable and resplendent in the wind — it was. The next day — it was not. History — the dullard — is devoid of originality. History's inventiveness is only in minor details. What happened then could happen now.

Perhaps the clear although not powerful mind of Nicholas, had — in years of ruling — learned to estimate in some degree the lack of cohesiveness in the units that went to form his empire. He sensed — it may be — certain necessary supports of the ill-built, topheavy structure beginning to grow weak and fall.

He did not fight the issue directly. That would be to admit it. Always his subtlety counseled the roundabout road. He fought it indirectly. He fought it by keeping the people amused, by outward pomp, by seeing that their minds were employed. His orderliness, his economic nature, impelled him to make the diversions useful. Therefore he made public a plan of joining the Don and the Volga by means of a canal. And he who hated change and progress — unless projected by himself — was turning his attention to a swift means of steam transportation between Peter and Moscow. If Paris was worth a mass, was not Peter worth a railroad?

He was contemplating a council for codification of the laws, a most gigantic undertaking in a perilous period. He had had a good many unpleasant interviews over this. They had angered him and they had saddened him. Some of the lawmakers were bold enough to declare that political advancement should depend upon personal ability, and not upon birth or rank. Likewise it should not be marketable. This had displeased him. It was

worrying him now in this night of loneliness and illness. The arguments had been many and bitter. What was he to do? Was he not besieged by aristocrats who were supporting his reign, who asked in return political preferment for their sons? And then — regardless of codification of laws — did not ruling belong to the ruling class?

All these things with which he had tried to amuse the people were merely the tricks of the Cæsars, when they had felt Rome falling, and the foreigner rushing in. But France was doing the same thing! It was one of the reasons for her projected conquests in Algiers. This proved royalty had reached its limit of growth because, for its models, it was forced to go back instead of creating anew. But life — and science which was beginning to guide it — had not gone back. In the first instance it meant weakness and old age. In the second, it meant the limitless life of progress.

To fight it directly, therefore, would be to admit it. This he would not do. By this he measured the pressure of his fears.

If he could only build a Chinese Wall around Russia, and one so high the outside world could not climb over! But the day for building Chinese Walls was done. Even killing, even exiling, could no longer control so widespread a conflagration of mind, because it had seized upon humanity in its entirety.

Yet to prove that he was a potent force, he was obliged to resort to just these things. He knew they were useless. But they helped to show his unyielding spirit.

He could invent nothing new. That was not his fault. It was because the range of inventiveness in kings had reached a limit. It was like the perfect equilibrium of forces in the human body which signifies death. But he must still keep his place in the battle! He was no coward. He would not run away. To the last he would live up to his ideal of a king of kings.

What he saw without imagination, without the dangerous light of vision, frightened him. He saw rebellion of peoples against the teachings of the past. He saw rebellion against religion, duty, family ties, respect to sovereign, daily work, class distinctions. The bonds, in short, which held the old fabric of civilization together were weakening. A progression was being made in which

they would not be needed. It was merely the discarding of an outworn garment. Evidently in progress which men like Herzen and Chaadaiev, and all his unruly Polish and Russian exiles, were preaching about continually — progress scientifically considered — there could be no such thing as Right, as Wrong.

Some of these, as he thought, half-crazy thinkers declared that Right and Wrong were merely crutches for man to lean upon in his childhood. A staggering idea! Different ideals were making themselves felt, born usually of forces of which he disapproved, but over which he had no control.

Education and easier living — these sarcastic, daring thinkers were asserting — must, in course of years, lessen the distance between the nobleman and the man of the lower class. This proved that the distance was not unbridgable, and was not God-created. When the lower class possessed certain acquirable mental qualities, then the title nobleman must disappear forever because it would have no meaning. It had, therefore — they said — not so much to do with the quality of the mind, of the soul of man, as with the quality of the substance that wrapped his body about; an external, a changeable thing. Life might be reducible at length to the social oneness from which it started. It was just the swinging around of a little foolish circle which history chops up arrogantly and dubs a Period of Time, instead of a divinely inexorable circle of eternity. A trifle, then! Something external, to be dealt with as he had dealt in his opening Royal Ball with changes in women's costume.

It was something for recording tersely in a fashion sheet, instead of tragically in a history.

All this emerging thought of the New World projected by daring Slavic exiles, in London, Paris, Geneva, which reached him through his advisers, dazzled him like some gigantic sun which was rising unexpectedly. In past ages faith had enlarged and made more splendid the heart of man. Science was beginning to perform a similar service for his brain. Nicholas was beginning to feel, as his brother Alexander had felt in the last tragic days, that there was nothing he could change or have as he wished, and it would be just as well if he were not here. Stormy and iron-hearted

as he was, he could not control conditions. He could not even guide in a direction serviceable to himself and to his country this enormous evolution impelled by a new order of mind. Fear had developed in Nicholas, not imagination, but mind in an accelerated tempo.

Weak, trembling with fever, the terrors of contemplation, he dropped down upon a chair. He covered his face with his hands. He prayed the prayer which Alexander had written just before he left Petersburg forever:

O mon grand Dieu! Prends-nous en ta sacrê garde et aie compassion et pitié de nous.

CHAPTER XXV

THE QUARREL

ALEXIS SERGIEWITCH was swinging along briskly to pay a visit to Gogol, who was leaving Russia for an indefinite stay abroad. He knew that he would miss Gogol, and the fact worried him. The long wide streets showed on either side the unbroken whiteness of the snow. The cold was windless, but it had a certain taciturn ferocity. He liked it. It struck energy into him. He felt that it stimulated him mentally. Far beyond the end of the street along which he was moving so briskly, he knew that dim bluish plains spread, across which winds could sweep unmolested their tragedies of cold and death.

It was dark now at three o'clock in the afternoon. He was barely able to see, high up in the murky air above his head, the shaft of gold on the top of the Admiralty which, on blue fine days of sun and summer, sailors can glimpse upon the Gulf of Finland. The Neva was smooth. It was a long black forbidding line between white spaces. Then the dark closed in rapidly and Petersburg became a pale, gleaming Parian marble city, instead of a city that was gloomy and septentrional. It suddenly emerged in unexpected pearly whiteness. It charmed his eyes, this gleaming, architectural ghost of snow. He paused abruptly in his walk in order to enjoy it critically. It set him to dreaming of the gay Parian cities of old.

In the light of this happier mood he began to consider the quarrel he had had with Natalie Nicolaevna the day before. Then he began to slacken his pace a little in order to think it over. With one of those generous mental reactions after anger, which were so common with him, it occurred to him that Natalie Nicolaevna was merely a little girl, and perhaps he had been harsh with her. Since she was a little girl, it was his duty, of course, to be indulgent. He must treat her like one, and without anger. She had wanted him to see her in the new fur coat which had delighted her

so, and which had really been the innocent cause of all the trouble. By ignoring her request, he had refused, and of course hurt her feelings.

Again he stopped in his walk. It was easy to make reflections like these in the cold, clean air whose inspiring sting seemed to erase what was bitter in the past, away from the stuffy house of the small rooms, and on the way to see Gogol with whom he was happy. He was so impressed with this self-accusation, and by remembering that Schukowsky had warned him that he who had loved so many women would not find it easy to put up with one, that he turned about and started back. He would patch up the quarrel if he could. In some way he would try to make amends.

The Court Set of Peter was a trying place, he argued, in which to put a little country girl, and especially one who was so lovely. He had been hasty. He had not considered her sufficiently. Few heads as young as hers, he reflected, could withstand successfully the adulation that had been given her. There was something about Peter, too, in winter, that was destructive to morals; a hothouse atmosphere; forced inaction indoors for months; the heavy scent of tropic flowers; the burning of heady perfumes; wines, spiced and rare; the languor of music; and continued dissipation. He would not be as unjust to her as the world had been to him.

In addition, he felt a little guilty because he knew that he no longer loved her, no longer desired her. She was numbered now among the multiple emotions that had gone not to return. But if he did not love her, he pitied her and sympathized with her follies. And these, he knew, were not the qualities to satisfy, to hold, a woman who was young. Because he was older, he must do his best to prevent a wreck for her and the children. And he must avert scandal if he could.

Perhaps, too, by conciliating her he could get her to agree to go to the country. Once there, he would see that the stay was prolonged. That would hush up the stories which were in circulation. In the country, far from annoyances, where he himself could be calmer, and where bill collectors could not get at him, he would set about carrying out the plan for getting away from Russia for a little while. He had some rights. The need of his getting out of

the country was great and urgent, and it justified him. In this narrow family life into which his own folly had thrust him, he was beginning to lose all that was best in himself.

The more rapidly he walked toward home in the clean, cold air, the more he took the blame from his wife. Their unhappiness was largely the result of a penniless genius marrying a penniless beauty. And lack of money was merely a logical complexity of civilization. He, too, longed for the proud, poised security of the rich and titled men he knew. Why should not she have the same longing? Lack of money made him uneasy and made him fear the future. She probably feared it, too. And he knew how he feared shabby living, old clothes, and ridicule. It was probably merely financial insecurity which was giving him the renewed attacks of nervous depression. Orlow's were the surroundings which would have suited him and made him happy. It was natural for his wife, too, to long for the luxury of the princely women with whom she associated continually.

He kept on excusing conditions and thinking things as he would like to have them, because it was easier than to act or to confront fact. Of course the fault could not be all hers. And then he had such an unquenchable lust for life! He must learn to renounce like other people. He had always wanted all kinds of life — and all at one time. No wonder things went wrong. He knew that he was strange and undivinable. He had heard her tell Dantes that she was lonely. He had rapidly argued himself into a better mood, the proper mood, in which to approach Natalie Nicolaevna. First he would ask to see the new fur coat with the lining of white satin and embroidered dots. Then he would ask her to put it on. That would be the kind of beginning that would please her.

He opened the door downstairs, the street door. He stepped into the flat, flagstone-floored outer hall, from which a short flight of stairs ascended to the floor upon which the outer living-room door opened. He pulled off his gloves. He loosened and unwound his heavy muffler. He began to unbutton his heavy coat preparatory to taking it off and putting it under his arm. His hands had reached the last button of the beaver coat when the door above opened and Heeckeren-Dantes and Madame Pushkin

stepped out. Their faces were merry. They both radiated the happiness they always felt in each other's society. Dantes was bending toward her, laughing, gay, seductive, to say good-bye. They were so absorbed in each other that they did not notice him.

He looked up. He saw them. His hands dropped from the coat he was unbuttoning. The muffler fell to the floor. It was not easy to believe his eyes. In the sudden anger which swept over him, and which he could not control, his face turned black. Just then his wife caught sight of him. She signaled to Dantes. The expression upon his face stopped the conventional words of greeting upon the lips of Dantes. Natalie Nicolaevna's face, however, showed no fear. It wore, on the contrary, a look that resembled interest, curiosity. She was just as his merry mulatto mother had been, a person whom life could not touch. Why had he not observed this before? The resemblance struck him with swift and sudden pain. Like his easily bored mother, who had escaped from duties and annoyances, a scene amused her if it did not become too violent. It helped break up the tedium of her existence which was her chief worry.

The body of Pushkin became more erect. It became insolent, determined, aggressive.

"Did not Natalie Nicolaevna tell you that I forbade you to come here?"

Dantes glanced toward Madame Pushkin. Pushkin sensed instantly that he did not care what became of himself, that his one thought was to shield her.

"She did."

"Then will you be good enough to explain why you are here?"

"I did not take the prohibition seriously. To tell you the truth, I thought that she was jesting."

"I do not know why you should consider words of mine not meant seriously."

"By that remark, just now, Monsieur Pushkin, I wish to assure you I meant no offense. I had . . . of course . . . to say something — Any reply, I suppose, could be misinterpreted."

"I not only forbade you to enter this house, but I forbade

Natalie Nicolaevna from receiving your attentions in public."

"I do not — understand —"

"Dancing with you, flirting with you. Dragging my name, in short, in the dirt."

Dantes turned white, but Pushkin knew that he cared not a *kopec* what happened to himself.

Madame Pushkin's face was now expressing the liveliest interest. It showed neither remorse nor anger.

"I beg you to believe, Monsieur Pushkin, that nothing of the kind has happened . . . nor been intended."

He could not help but admire the restraint of Dantes. But this restraint was nor for the world's sake, nor for him, he knew. It was to save the woman he loved. There were some good qualities in the frivolous fellow, evidently.

"What damned nonsense . . . to feign ignorance of this *barrage* of anonymous accusations — letters — sent — very likely — by that foster-father of yours, for the purpose of ruining me, and ruining my home."

When he began speaking, he had no thought of the Ambassador from the Netherlands. A sudden light of inspiration had blazed in upon him and told him the truth. It was that versatile diplomatist who was destroying him for the purpose of saving his son. The expression upon Dantes's face informed Pushkin that the accusation was a surprise to him, but that he, too, thought that it might be true. The face of Dantes was beginning now to wear a look of wonderment. The revelation had shocked him. Silence fell between them for a little, heavy and questioning. Then the eyes of Dantes rested again upon Natalie Nicolaevna. They were deep with love, with pity, with longing. To him she alone mattered. Anger, reckless, savage and uncontrolled, flamed in Pushkin at that look. His voice was threatening as he spoke.

"I know, Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes, all about the disgraceful part you have been playing in this dirty affair."

Dantes's face bleached again. He was no coward. There were qualities in him evidently that commanded respect. He was standing the lash of insult for the sake of a woman. Pushkin's long white teeth shone cruelly. His eyes turned black. With a

sudden gesture he threw off the fur coat. He leaped up the stairs two steps at a time. With astonishing quickness he reached the level above.

Just at that moment, hearing loud and angry words outside — and wondering why her sister did not return — Katarina Nicolaevna came out into the hallway. As she opened the door and joined them, she looked more like a little girl than ever. Her hair hung down in two thick, light-brown braids. She had on the working clothes with which she helped with the babies.

Again Dantes controlled his voice, his words:

"I beg you, Monsieur Pushkin, to believe that I am innocent in these disgraceful anonymous accusations — that I am sorry, too — and just as surprised as you," taking a step back as he spoke.

Slender, unique, dangerous, Pushkin came toward him. In his eyes, Dantes had already read his fate.

"Then it is my duty to teach you to respect my word."

He seized Dantes by the throat. His old athletic agility, his trained dueling strength returned. Furiously he shook him back and forth like a reed.

"I have a great mind to kill you. That would end this dirty affair. I have a mind to kick you downstairs! That is what you deserve!"

To frivolous, fashionable, merry Dantes, the suddenly released anger of Pushkin, which so surpassed the normal and at the moment turned him into a black man, gave him the sad, the tragic sensation of being suddenly plunged back into some ancient, savage, grieving twilight of creation, which the brute still ruled, before the amenities of civilization had come to soften and to brighten it. He was terrified by the depths upon depths of emotion which were revealed to him within this man, and the measure by which they surpassed the normal. In comparison his own light, butterfly, drawing-room graces shriveled. He felt wounded in body and in mind. He felt all but annihilated by this blaze of savage brutality.

Gradually, then, the feeling changed. It slipped over into pity for the wife. No wonder she was lonely — that lovely child — living with such a monster as this. Pity for her dulled his own

wounds. Pity — and the consoling presence of her beauty — which was so near him, and the sudden stinging consciousness of his consuming desire to possess her, numbed his pain. He must be always near her! He must protect her.

Katarina's voice was heard.

"Stop — for the love of God! Stop — Alexis Sergiewitch — before you commit a crime which not even God can pardon!"

He flung Dantes back against the wall. Helpless, trembling, but with strange absence of anger, Dantes rested there. Pushkin staggered back against the opposite wall. Between them the two women stood. Dantes was trying frantically to regain his breath. At the same time he was trying with nervous haste to smooth his rumpled attire, and to become presentable, and to control his too rapid breathing. While he was thus occupied, an idea flashed across his brain. It was the voice of Katarina which had suggested it. Hoarse, gasping at intervals for breath, but with perceptible effort to be serious, and to catch the conventional phrase which his upbringing and training demanded, he addressed Pushkin:

"It is evidently, Monsieur Pushkin, all a great mistake, this quarrel of ours. I supposed you knew — all the time — that I came here, not to see your wife, but because I have fallen in love with her sister. In fact, I came to-day, Monsieur Pushkin, to beg your permission to marry Katarina Nicolaevna."

Dantes looked toward the young girl, with a pitiful attempt of a little gesture of pardon for his panting, disheveled body. Madame Pushkin laughed aloud. She was frankly amused, and she did not attempt to conceal the fact. Her voice sounded just like the little yellow canary in the cage of gold, when the dazzling sunlight blazed in upon him. Happiness shone deep, deep, within the honest eyes of poor little Katarina.

Dantes knew that the way out he had found, in that painful moment of inspiration, meant the supreme sacrifice. And in this moment of physical pain and mental suffering, the splendor of it blazed up like a destructive bonfire and dazzled him. But the sacrifice would keep him near the face he adored! He knew he could not give her up. He knew now he could never get free from this reckless love. At whatever cost, he must be by her side.

He could not give her up! Within him there was not the strength with which to do it. His eyes must embrace her. His hands must touch her. His lips must seek her. He estimated accurately how low he had fallen, by the knowledge that in the physical agony he had just been enduring he was consumed with desire for her.

"What a shocking insult to my intelligence!" meditated Pushkin, registering now a different kind of anger, and seeing through the trick. "That idea of his is as brilliant as it is false. But it is serviceable!" was his next thought. "How ridiculous to try to put over such a lie, upon a man as deeply versed in the intricacies of passion as I am. And yet, it is a way out. It is a way out that sacrifices myself, honest little Katarina of the trusting eyes, and Dantes, to my uncaring wife. This — this disgraceful lie, which we must all live up to, is the price we pay for her face, her faultless body."

Conflicting feelings, swift and bitter perceptions, surged within him. Natalie Nicolaevna's beauty had the quality of Helen's in that it brought destruction to others while she escaped. She did not even have the intelligence to comprehend this master stroke of diplomacy on the part of Dantes. A man had just flung away his life to save her, and she did not care.

He had never been so deeply enraged with his wife since he married her as he was at this moment. Never had he been able to measure so accurately her mental inferiority or her heartlessness. She was just as immune to sorrow as Helen of whom the Greeks used to declare that Beauty, when it is sufficiently great and rare, may not enter a place of grief.

But Katarina, honest Katarina, was happy. All along, judging by her face at this moment, she had loved him, this fickle, nimble-tongued, elegantly dressed Dantes. Her eyes. Ah — her eyes! Who could have the heart to disappoint her? But who could have the heart to play such a base trick upon her! He could not bear to look at her eyes.

It would be a good marriage, socially considered, and financially, for a dowerless girl like her. Natalie Nicolaevna was frankly amused by the look on Katarina's face, and she made no

attempt to hide it. She laughed again in just the same way she did when she called her daily: "*Silly little goose!*" Katarina now looked shy and a little ashamed. She had not taken on the quick, superficial polish of the great world like Natalie Nicolaevna. She was still naïve and innocent, and not sure of herself; still of the schoolroom. She was the little country girl. What charm she had for men — when her alluring sister was not present to eclipse her — was because she was innocent in a city where innocence was rare. When Natalie Nicolaevna made use of her as combined confidante, playmate, and unselfish little drudge, she enjoyed calling her "Little Stupidity." She was grave — Katarina; of good intentions; and slightly hesitating in speech.

This would make him a party to the conspiracy against the poor child, who was in the habit of waiting upon them all, and then wearing his wife's discarded clothes. He hated the complicity. He was ashamed of himself. He hated the baseness. The quick thinking which saved Dantes's life, and at the same time saved him from being a murderer, sacrificed them all to the forget-me-not eyes of a light woman.

But polite society was filled with makeshifts just such as this. Society would accept it. Society enjoyed nothing so much as a well-sugar-coated lie. It saved the children, too. It saved the home. And it would silence the scandal.

And then, trembling, and self-disdainful, he measured his own baseness and the weakness within him. But now, perhaps, he could persuade his wife to take the children and go to one of the country estates of his family. If he could, this would leave him free for a little while. Then he would follow Châli's plan. Then — for a little while — he would get out of Russia! Perhaps, there — away from Russia — the old happiness would return which he had not felt for so long. His art — which the gilded inanities, the insincerities of court life were stifling — would revive. And then, perhaps — who could tell — *love!* Ah — those fascinating cities of Asia whose fervor Châli had flashed upon him!

But there — there in front of him — was Katarina. If he could only get away from that look of happiness within her eyes; surprised, unexpected happiness. It was love that was shining there.

This love — in her girlish eyes — no one else seemed to see or care about save himself. He began to suffer again from his trained mental grasp of the situation, and a slowly expanding comprehension that did not permit him to miss anything.

It forced him to admit — if grudgingly — that love such as Dantes cherished for Natalie Nicolaevna made him great. He was vexed at the fact. But he had to confess it. The sin of Dantes was his one great quality.

Katarina made a little helpless gesture as if for him to reply. She had evidently been waiting for it. He had put it off long, to be sure. Without hardly knowing what he said, he answered courteously, but without looking in his direction, that Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes had his permission to marry Katarina Nicolaevna. Then, in order to avoid her look of gratitude, which he could not bear, he abruptly entered the house.

"Katarina Nicolaevna Goncharow!" exclaimed Madame Pushkin in her high and merry voice, with the smile that set the dimples dancing at both corners of her mouth. "You will be Baroness Heeckeren-Dantes!"

Katarina blushed happily. She hung her head. She could not find a word to say.

Katarina believed that if a man asked to marry a woman, it was because he loved her. That was all there was about it. It settled it. Then she thought of the hours, of the afternoons, he had spent patiently playing games with Madame Pushkin when, of course, he had been longing to be with her. Of the infinite complexities of love, she had no foreshadowing.

Dantes was looking hungrily across at the woman he longed for, the woman he could not resist. When Natalie Nicolaevna gave him her hand in good-bye, he fancied that she leaned toward him seductively, that he felt her to be grateful, and in a different mood. Unable to control himself or to reason longer, he pulled her curly head over toward him. He held it there as long as he dared. He was thinking of the dining-table in the little room that was green and gold, where the tall silver candles — which had not been lighted — and the roses, still waited for the feast that had not been. He whispered in her ear a day and an hour, remember-

ing upon the instant some words of hers which at the moment had shocked him by their cold-bloodedness:

"We do not need to be careful before Katarina. Katarina is a little dunce."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE INTERVIEW

The marriage of Katarina Nicolaevna and Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes had been hastened. The festivities had been lessened in number and expensiveness, partly on account of the indisposition of His Majesty, although the illness was not permitted to be discussed. Pushkin had been forced to bear some of the expenses for the wedding and the festivities that followed. This had been a heavy drain upon him. This morning, alone in his study, he was just trying to figure out the true state of desperation of his finances, when Katarina Nicolaevna called.

She came in quietly, unannounced, in just the way she used to when she lived here. He not only respected his little sister-in-law, but he was genuinely fond of her. He greeted her cordially. He helped divest her of her wraps, wondering the while what it was that could have brought her here at this very early hour. He knew she had been out the night before, and late, with Madame Pushkin. Usually she came only to see Natalie Nicolaevna, and seldom came even to the door of his study. But he was genuinely fond of little Katarina, and she had a place in all that was best in his heart. He was grateful for countless good services from her in the past. He hastened to whirl about nimbly a brown leather chair, and bring it up for her. Still wondering, he placed it opposite, and asked her to be seated. What a quaint and appealing little figure was Katarina Nicolaevna, he sensed afresh upon the moment, especially in these pretentious, fashionable, new wedding clothes which did not suit her. Since her marriage she wore her hair up all the time, and her skirts had been made longer. Her clothes were expressive of the desire to grow up quickly into the dignity of her new position. But to him she only looked more like a child who was playing busily at being grown up, in borrowed clothes.

She had a way of folding her hands, palm upward in her lap,

when she sat down for a prolonged stay, or for the talking over of anything serious and puzzling, that reminded him of religious church-going women in remote country villages. In the depths of her deep blue eyes there was something sometimes dark like a veil, which hung between her and the crude, harsh facts which quicker-witted people see. That was the way she looked now.

Her blue eyes, deeper, darker, than her sister's under a broad white brow, were truthful and trusting, even if they were not keen or penetrating. They were the eyes of a woman who played no tricks. They looked unwaveringly at the speaker. Her heavy hair, more brown than gold, and minus that baby softness and seductiveness of her sister's, was not used to the discipline of coils and pins. It had the look of a little girl's hair, bobbed up briskly to run to her governess, and added to the extreme youthfulness of her appearance. She looked and looked at him this morning with grave dark eyes and did not speak. He began to be uncomfortable. The silence had lasted so long, now, that he was wondering, with a sort of fear, what it could be that was coming.

"Do you think that Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes loves me?"

It was out at last. His worst fears were realized.

If she would only turn her head away to give him a chance to collect his thoughts in this sad complexity so he could reply! He could not find the courage to answer truthfully, so he evaded.

"Why do you ask, Katarina Nicolaevna?"

"I do not know, Alexis Sergiewitch, that I ought to tell you. I do not know what I ought to do."

"Is Natalie Nicolaevna up yet?" he inquired suddenly.

"No, Alexis Sergiewitch. That is why I am in your study now. Natalie Nicolaevna told me that she should not rise before noon to-day."

There was no way of escape. He might just as well face it.

"What is it, Katarina Nicolaevna — that worries you?"

"It is this, Alexis Sergiewitch. And yet I don't know that I ought to tell you. I don't know what I ought to do!"

He waited. He knew, of course, what was coming. The only hope that he was able to cherish was that there were corners of this domestic tragedy which her brain had not been able to penetrate.

"When we go out together, Alexis Sergiewitch — the three of us — since you no longer go with us, night after night, Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes barely even speaks to me. His neglect of me is so great that the least observant people see it and speak about it. If it is a ball, he dances once, just once, with me. But he even grudges that amount of time! And while we dance, he doesn't speak a word, not a single word. If I speak to him, he does not hear; he is not feigning; it is genuine. He really does not hear. And he is in such haste to get the dance over that we seldom finish it. When he can stand it no longer, he drops me just anywhere, and rushes away in search of Natalie Nicolaevna. He does not leave her side for the rest of the night! Then all the people begin to watch them. I hear remarks on every side. Some make fun of me. Some make fun of you. They all say bad things about my sister. They say, too, that you know it, and that you permit it. But I know that is untrue. Although you never talk to me very much, I know in my heart that you are a better man than that." Her voice grew thick and broke. She could talk no more.

He had always been faithful in public defense of his wife just as he was in the habit of being faithful — somewhat dramatically and always poetically — in causes that were futile or false. His faithfulness to her follies was poetry lived. He had tried earnestly to shield her from the dangers of the world, and now he longed at any expense to shield poor little Katarina from knowledge of the truth.

He felt that the attraction between Natalie Nicolaevna and Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes was the attraction of steel and the magnet. They were swept together by a force they could neither guide nor control. They were unable to resist the pleasure of each other. On her part, he knew, it was merely pleasure. The destructive emotions were in Dantes. With him it was probably a grand passion, in so far as his light nature was capable of such a thing. He knew how they danced and jested, and played games. He knew how they talked with the delight and the unrestraint of two young soldiers in the barracks.

He who knew the world of love intrigues as few have known it realized that it was impossible for Natalie Nicolaevna and

Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes to be kept apart. But it was not easy for him to believe, even now, that she was gravely guilty.

He recalled how, in the past, when the two had met at balls and receptions, he had felt, with the other guests who were present, that Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes and his wife were alone, so emphatically inconsequential did the others become. It was as if transparent walls first isolated and then shut them in together. Now poor little Katarina was beginning to see with the eyes of the others. He had hoped she would be permitted to be blind. He had hoped that she would be spared.

They were physical mates — Natalie Nicolaevna and Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes; that was the underlying, the basic cause. He smiled scornfully to himself at the uselessness of such words as *law, convention,* to keep two people like them apart. He knew that his girl-bride had undergone a metamorphosis whose limit he could not measure. But he was sorry for Katarina. He felt guilty, too.

"Last night, Alexis Sergiewitch, when we were driving home from the ball, I sat on a seat alone by myself. Natalie Nicolaevna and Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes sat together on the opposite seat. Neither one of them spoke a word to me. They did not even seem to know that I was there. That is one of the things that hurts me so, the way I am ignored. He was leaning close beside her, whispering in her ear all the way, so that I could not hear. When we reached home, Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes jumped down and ran with me to the door. Then he kissed me hurriedly without even looking at me, said good-bye before I could speak, and rushed away. I supposed, of course, he would drive Natalie Nicolaevna home and then return. But he did not. I do not know what this means, Alexis Sergiewitch. That is why I am here . . . to ask you."

"Did you leave the ball early, Katarina Nicolaevna?"

"Yes, Alexis Sergiewitch."

"When did Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes return?"

"Very, very late! It must have been toward morning."

Pushkin knew that this was about the time his wife had come

in. She had explained that she was late because she had remained until the ball was over.

"And I had ever so much attention — being a bride — ever so many engagements to dance, too! But they made me leave! They did not consult my wishes in the least."

Pushkin's face wore an expression so stern, so inscrutable, as she spoke, that she wished now, in her simple girlish heart, that she had said nothing.

"The other day, Alexis Sergiewitch, I tried to talk to Natalie Nicolaevna. I told her that Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes loved her instead of me, and she knew it."

"What reply did she make, Katarina Nicolaevna?"

"'Very likely!' she exclaimed. 'All men love me.'

"Then" looking up solemnly at Pushkin, with those deep blue eyes in which there was a veil that hung always between her and the last fine edge of fact — "I said it was not right for her to receive attention from my husband. I told her it was wrong to you, too, Alexis Sergiewitch, and wrong to me, her sister who loved her."

"Well" — leaning toward her slightly.

"She called me 'Silly little goose.'"

Here Katarina Nicolaevna's lips trembled. Her eyes began to grow black with unshed tears. "She went on to explain that I might learn — too — some time myself. Then she laughed. You know how she laughs when she does not want to talk, Alexis Sergiewitch, and longs to avoid the subject. Well — that was the way!

"When I come over here in the afternoon, Alexis Sergiewitch, to take care of the babies for her, she meets my husband. They see each other intimately — and often . . ." beginning to sob, burying her face in her hands.

"*And* — That is not the worst!" — looking up again.

"What do you mean, Katarina Nicolaevna?"

"I cannot hate her!"

Little Katarina had reached alone by a different road the same conclusion, he saw, that he had reached. No one could hate her because she did not have sufficient personality to hang hate upon.

"She would confess anything to me, Alexis Sergiewitch — even with my own husband — and then laugh, then pet me, and call me 'silly little goose,'" — her voice thickening again suddenly.

Through this recital, Pushkin had sat stern and white in his chair in front of his disordered desk. There was no way for her to find out what he felt or what he thought. His pride, she saw, was so great that it would not permit her to approach him. He was determined to suffer on alone and in silence. But she knew he suffered. She respected him and liked him — because of his unfailing generosity to her in the past — and yet there was something in him that repelled her and kept her at a distance. In his attitude she sensed, dully, a commingling of shame, stubbornness, regret, and hauteur.

"He married me, so he could have the right to be always near her — the woman he loves! And she is not even true to him — either. You will laugh, Alexis Sergiewitch, and think that I am a silly little goose, just as she calls me, when I tell you that I am sorry that she is unable to be true to him. She is flirting with a lot of other men — right now . . ."

He knew! He knew! Little Katarina did not need to tell him how irresponsible she was, nor how cruel and seductive.

"I am frightened, Alexis Sergiewitch, at her recklessness! I think there is danger in it — for us all. You have not been with us lately, you know. You do not know just how bad it is. It frightens me — the way the other women look at her. She laughs — she flings defiance at them, by taking away, for an hour, for an evening, their sweethearts, their husbands. This last week I have been amazed at her daring. Every night I watch the light of triumph come creeping into my sister's eyes when her presence makes other women lose charm, and she assembles about her her nightly coterie of admirers."

Pushkin pulled out his watch.

"An engagement, Alexis Sergiewitch?"

He nodded.

"Do not worry, dear little sister Katarina Nicolaevna," taking her by the shoulders, and looking down with kindly earnestness

into her eyes. "Trust to me — I will see to it. It's only her playfulness — her folly."

He helped her on with her wraps. Her face looked a little calmer now. She felt that she could trust in him, only, as she was going out the door, she wished his face did not look so white, so frozen.

As soon as the door closed upon Katarina Nicolaevna, he knew that there was only one way to clear up this shameful affair, which had lasted too long, and which was threatening to make social outcasts of them all. It was the only code of honor that he knew. The scandal must be stopped. God and Death should decide between them.

He sat down to his desk. He wrote out a will, bequeathing everything that he might inherit from his family to his wife and children. Then he put on his fur coat and went out. He signaled the first *isvostchick*. He gave him instructions to be delivered to Monsieur Danzas, of the French Embassy, to make arrangements for the duel.

When he came back and entered his study again, he found Gogol. Gogol was leaving early, the next day but one, for a long stay outside of Russia. He chided Pushkin for not having visited him. He was nervous and excited, but he was full of news. He had on a new, country-made suit of the peculiar gray in fashion just now which was called *fumée de Moscou*. He wore huge yellow gloves with fox-skin wrists that stood out. He had on a bristling yellow fox-skin cap to match, and handsome, well-fitting boots.

"Vassili Andrejewitch Schukowsky sent his best love to you, Alexis Sergiewitch," slapping his hands together in front of the fire. "He told me to tell you the reason he has not been to see you lately is because he can serve you best just now by not seeing you."

Pushkin looked up sensitively. He was surprised.

"What do you mean, Nicolai Vassiljewitch?"

"The Emperor told Her Majesty — whom Schukowsky in his position of family tutor sees daily — that he disapproved of Schukowsky's intimacy with you. Yes — yes — Schukowsky told me to tell you! It worries me, Alexis Sergiewitch. I don't know just what it means."

"His Majesty is ill, Nicolai Vassiljewitch."

"I know, Alexis Sergiewitch — ill. Yes — a caprice; ill," seating himself near the stove, and stamping his feet briskly.

"Likewise. Schukowsky told me to tell you that he had had another letter from Caucasia."

Pushkin became instantly attentive. Before he could find time to speak, Gogol broke in.

"Handsome Bestushew-Marlinsky has disappeared!"

"Dead?"

"I suppose so. It was this way — Schukowsky said."

Pushkin knew, of course, if it were death, it was a self-chosen death.

Gogol continued to deliver his message.

"In one of the skirmishes that are always taking place with the rebellious mountain tribes, there was an order to attack. The place to be attacked was a piece of woodland. Then a scout came running up with the information that it was a planned ambush in which all the Russian troops were to be massacred.

"They blew retreat accordingly. The soldiers obeyed the call, all except Marlinsky. What do you suppose he did?"

Pushkin shook his head.

"Put spurs to his horse, dashed on, into the woods and out of sight. He was never seen again! The officer in command — who had admired him long for his bravery — sent a detachment of Mingrelian *chasseurs* to rescue him. They didn't find a trace of him, Alexis Sergiewitch. Not a trace of him! He disappeared from the face of the earth as if by magic."

"Since the peculiar murder of his girlish mistress, Oline Nesterzoff, Nicolai Vassiljewitch, in his room, you know — he has tried to die. They say . . ."

"Don't feel so bad! They say — Alexis Sergiewitch — that continually he has been seeking death in battle. He lived with the daring of a glorified spirit. Do try to control yourself a little bit, dear little brother! He is happy now, I tell you."

"Nicolai Vassiljewitch, I was just thinking of something he wrote in a letter long ago."

"What was it?"

"'*Death is tragic in this lonely land.*' Dead — in the flower of his youth. The elegant Bestushew — like young Victor Metternich!" murmured Pushkin. "How recklessly he used to talk — Bestushew-Marlinsky — and make love — How he could improvise!"

It was not easy to find words to bridge the silence that followed this.

"Anything . . . wrong, Alexis Sergiewitch?" — observing his companion suddenly.

Pushkin shook his head. Another silence followed, which Gogol broke tentatively with abrupt words.

"I wish you were going with me, dear little brother! I should be happier."

"Why, Nicolai Vassiljewitch?"

"I should know you are safe. Can't you come? I feel, I know, you are not safe here. The Government's confidence in you is only feigned, and you have lost the friendly applaud of the masses which used to shield you. All things would be better — life — art — if you went abroad with me. You need rest!"

"It is true, Nicolai Vassiljewitch, I do need rest. I am bewildered and exasperated — as you know, to the last degree. But I should not be surprised if I did have a long rest — soon," with a transient glint of the old humor. "Things will mend. Do not worry!"

When they said good-bye they kissed each other tenderly. The two heads so close together presented an interesting contrast; the one burned out with living, tragic with the marks of many passions; the other pure, pale, as a statue of wax.

"Where to first, dear little brother, Nicolai Vassiljewitch? I might want to join you, you know!" — with an attempt at lightness.

"Rome. In Rome I have a friend, an artist by the name of Ivanoff, who after years of prayer and ascetism, in order to make himself worthy, in order to make true and far-seeing the eyes of the soul, is devoting his life to a picture of the Resurrected Christ. It is there I am going. In the light of that face — it may be — I shall be permitted to learn greater things than art."

Hastily he made the sign of the cross over the bent head of Pushkin. He was gone.

For Gogol, Rome, the deathless city. For him a continuance of the brutal struggle into which, before he knew it, his life had been changed.

"It is winter, when Fate comes more than halfway to meet me."

He dropped down wearily in the worn brown chair. He stretched his legs out toward the fire, for sake of the comforting restorative of heat.

"If I could only get back once more — and then hold — the fresh wild power to rebel of that black man of the jungle who was my ancestor! Civilization has been too much."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE GREAT EMOTION

THE next day at dawn, as the hour would have been marked by a clock in a southern land, but black night in this bitter month of January of the polar winter, two *kibitkas*, with silent occupants muffled up in furs beyond recognition, set out for the little village of Kalammiki, a few versts distant from Peter. They made two black, swiftly moving dots upon the dull, opaque grayness of the long road. In one *kibitka* sat Pushkin with his second, young Danzas, of the French Embassy, and a physician. In the other was Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes with his second, and two men.

This bore little similarity to that picturesque duel in the cherry orchard so long ago in Bessarabia, to which he had driven gayly with a crowd of young bloods, when the dawn was red. Then he had walked like a dandy across the lush grass of spring — to meet his opponent — while little, warm, sportive winds had coquetted with his curls. He had worn white *piqué* made in the latest Paris fashion. His spirit had been light and free.

Now he was sad, in a sort of despair. Worst of all, he felt old, and he no longer cared for life. The physical aspects of nature he was looking out upon, this black and white winter world, were forbidding and depressing in the extreme.

He refused harshly to talk with Monsieur Danzas, his second, who was still hoping to effect a reconciliation and call the affair off. He would not listen and he would not speak. His mind was given over wholly to a personal meditation. The astonishing similarity between his life and that of the French poet, André Chénier, guillotined in the Great Revolution stuck in his mind. He had read Chénier continually lately. He wrote some verses to him. "His words would have been just as true of me:

At the foot of the scaffold, I tune my lyre."

As he sped along to keep, perhaps, his last tryst with death, the

beauty of great moments of the past came back to wound and to trouble him.

He recalled the deep, rich grass, and its sensuous murmur, throughout those nights of love of that marvelous summer long ago, down on the Ackermann Steppe, by Ismail. He recalled the eloquent Caucasian Mountains; their summits aged with snow that could not melt, and far away between them, the shining blue enamel of the Caspian Sea. He remembered the gardens of Bakshi Serai where the nightingales were singing under the moon, and the tides of youth were high.

And Châli! Ah! He caught his breath with the ecstasy of the perished past. How great was his regret! Would this lonely morning ride across the snow to the peasant village mean farewell to the plan they had made? Would it shut out the future for them both? How she had tried to save him, and how she had tried to give him the help of her clear-headed wisdom! If he died, there would be no way for him to send word that his thoughts were still of her.

Ah, the wonder of the visions her music had evoked! Those enchanting places of Islam, rich in beauty, and sacred in the silence of faith. The approach of night, in dim, mysterious cities of the East, and the noisy, chaotic life of the ports which reflected the fascinating stars of an alien world. *And — Africa!* He caught his breath. *Africa* — with its horizons of flame!

The *kibitkas* had drawn up to a level to the right of the village. On one side the place chosen for the duel was sheltered from view and the too free sweep of the wind by a row of fat-bellied fir trees upon which snow particles were hanging like frozen tears. The air was still thick and murky.

Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes continued to protest that he was unwilling to fight, and that he would do anything to satisfy Pushkin. Pushkin was in one of his reckless moods. He was irreconcilable. He was stung to madness with the scorn, with the ridicule of people.

The distance was measured off. The men took their places. The count began. At the first shot Pushkin fell. Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes threw aside his pistol and rushed over toward

him. He bent down over him. He longed to make amends. When he saw how seriously wounded he was, he tried to help him.

Bleeding, mortally ill, Pushkin refused his aid. He motioned, masterfully, for Monsieur Heeckeren-Dantes to go away.

"Go back! Take your place. We'll try over again," he dictated, while his blood dyed deeper the snow.

Dantes did as he commanded. Pushkin did not notice that he held no weapon now, because he had thrown his pistol away. He would give his wounded opponent all the satisfaction he wanted. Raising himself slightly upon one elbow because he was unable to stand, Pushkin took aim and fired again. The bullet cut a button from the coat sleeve of Dantes and made a slight flesh-wound in his arm. Pushkin fainted. The last remnant of his strength was gone. He was now merely a sad, black, helpless, crumpled mass upon the snow.

The next day he lay in his shabby little study upon a hastily set-up bed. He could not bear the thought of being in the room which the sunlight flooded, where hung the yellow bird in the cage of gold. Schukowsky, Natalie Nicolaevna, and little Katarina, whose husband was not seriously wounded, were beside him. Natalie Nicolaevna looked just as usual, freshly blonde, lovely and uncaring. She was hoping, happily, that he would not be ill long, because she had several social engagements which she did not wish to be forced to cancel. She was wondering now just what she ought to do about them. Besides, she had not been happy with this strange man, whose impetuosity had frightened her. Schukowsky was all but broken-hearted; he could not keep back the tears. Little Katarina, with earnest, grieved eyes, but nimble, pitiful hands, was the one who ministered to his suffering. Outside in the streets, crowds were beginning to gather. They were clamoring to learn if he would live or die.

Looking at his wife, lovely in blue silk and blond lace as she sat in the winter light, he exclaimed: "Poor child, what a good time the world will have in tearing her to pieces!" In her forget-me-not eyes, that met his then, there was a mingled glint of scorn and merriment. Then his eyes wandered over toward his bookcases. He tried to wave his hand toward them. He was unable to do

this, but his voice called out happily: "Farewell, my friends."

The Great Century now with its resplendent emotions was no more. The great individual was rapidly being numbered among the powers that were passing. Little people had come, broken, unsatisfactory, diminished fragments of the past. In this moment of disillusion and clear thinking, when the madness which had been life was falling from him like a cloak, his own passions — as he looked back upon them — had been petty, too. They had been little, lukewarm, inconsequential passions, like the poet of the roses and the wine which he was. They had been things of pleasure, not things of power. Most facts in connection with his own life, as he looked back upon them now in this moment of farewell, were petty, trivial.

Gone forever now was the power to better things, to connect the past with the future, and the changes of physical dissolution were sweeping rapidly on.

In the first agony, the wrench which separates definitely the soul from the body, when the vast, the terrible moving away from life begins, he felt for the first time the great emotion, which he had worn out body and mind in seeking, the emotion self-satisfying and uplifting, which his foolish, wild, untutored boyhood had tried to find in the arms of prostitutes.

Now he had found it — the great emotion — when the glorious face of bending Death leaned toward him. Now, when for giving up everything — even life itself — he could get back nothing, with the puzzling destiny of poets whom even the dumb forces of existence envy and wish to destroy, he found what he had sought. He was disgusted with living. He was weary of its baseness, of its wholly ignoble bargains, from which, if one wishes to go on, there can be no escape. He was happy now. His face shone with light, with joy, and there was satisfaction in his voice as he breathed his last words:

"Life is over!"

Like Alexander, in self-annihilation he had found the great reward. He knew now — great artist and accomplished sensualist that he had been — that renunciation is the supreme emotion.

Châli was informed in the late afternoon of the duel and the death of Pushkin. It was a sad, a disorganizing blow of existence to her. The future began to spread before her with the dull monotony of a desert. She felt there was nothing now that she wanted. There was nothing, indeed, left to live for.

When that night Count Alexis Orlow came to inform her that he was ready to start at once for Constantinople, he found her dead.

She was waiting for him just as she had promised. She was dressed as usual for an evening of pleasure in the Petersburg great-world. She wore white velvet embroidered in silver. She was resplendent in all her jewels. He realized instantly that it was the self-appointed death of the fatalistic Oriental. He knew that emotions change quickly in the heart of a woman of the East. She sat erect in her chair, just as usual, under the crystal chandelier where he was in the habit of finding her when he came to call. In death her face showed more plainly the noble, the antique touch of the East. She had the charm of a piece of marble that is tawny and dominated only by line. Even in death the sumptuousness of her body intoxicated his connoisseur's eyes. He recalled Metternich's words: "I have never loved anything inferior."

Clasped in her right hand was a piece of crumpled paper. He took it. He smoothed it out. At the bottom he read the signed name of Pushkin. It was the love-song the dead poet had written at the club and spent his last *kopec* to send to her.

Desire — beside you — burns me with its fever.
With the fire of your eyes my heart is consumed.

At the end of the paper there were some words scrawled with a pencil, as if for the beginning of another verse. They were:

Mon amour! Mon amour!

So it was Pushkin who had stood in his way all this time! It was Pushkin whom she did not have the courage to leave. That good-for-nothing, drunken rhymester! How low had he fallen, the princely Orlow. Now he understood what had baffled him and

occasioned delay. It was Pushkin, too, of course, who had played that trick upon him — kidnaping Châli — and then carrying her away from the Emperor's Coronation Ball. It was plain enough now for any one to see. What an ass he had been! He ground his teeth in rage, in grief. He could not bear to remain in Peter to meet the shame of it. He would leave immediately for Constantinople. There he would perfect arrangements for his Imperial Master to join him for their contemplated tour of Europe. In sadness he stood a little while longer beside the woman he had loved. The Palace he had rented by the Bosphorus could never know her now as mistress. He bent to kiss her. Then he left, turning his back forever as he did so, he knew, upon love — and his longing dream of renewed youth.

Outside, under the reviving lash of the cold, he thought:

"Lucky Viazemsky who ridiculed me, but who can live without love! Metternich, too, lived above the domination of emotion. Metternich is intellectual enough to take just enough of it to light pleasurably the passing hour."

When weeks later the news reached Gogol in his hostelry abroad, his heart-cry echoed throughout a continent: "All my joy," he wrote, "all the happiness of my life are buried in the grave of Pushkin."

Nicholas was glad. He crossed himself and murmured: "It is the will of God. As for me — I always forgive."

Benkendorf rubbed his soft little white hands and rejoiced: "How glad I am that it occurred to me to send the secret police, whose duty it is to stop duels, exactly in the opposite direction. Admirable!" he observed. "*Admirable!*"

The grief of the people, however, was threatening to turn into rage. Crowds were gathering in all the streets. Another Decembrists' Uprising was feared. Benkendorf began to worry over the danger of a popular demonstration. He ordered the coffin to be taken out secretly and in the night. He permitted only a limited number to attend the services. The body was then sent on in the night toward Moscow, there to be interred by the side of his merry mulatto mother, whose black strain in his blood had made life so precarious.

The masses in Peter were still grumbling in the streets and restless and Nicholas was afraid.

The death of a poet had shaken a throne.

That sullen, gloomy-eyed young officer of the Guards, Lermontov, who respected and obeyed no one, wrote in defiance of Nicholas — who at once sent him into exile — his "Lament Over the Death of Pushkin:"

He fell the slave of folly and false honor,
Consumed by the breath of slander —

. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

In life he walked alone,
Alone likewise to death he went,

. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

Who wore the crown of thorns beneath the myrtle crown.

. . . . . .
. . . . . .

The judge who errs not can decree revenge —

Eleven years after the death of Pushkin, Royal Bourbon France, which once had boasted of the sun-king, *le roi soleil*, had another revolution. Bourbon France became a republic. The outspreading effect of this astonishing social upheaval was so great that it drove the proud Austrian Chancellor, Prince Metternich, into exile in that England he hated. It caused the permanent overthrow of the last of the great aristocrats. Every throne in Europe was trembling.

Seven years after this, Nicholas, the Autocrat, became weary of life. He was alone now. There was no one to help him. He longed for death. He longed for release from a burden too great for any one man to bear. Uselessly, Prince Paskievich waved his Field-Marshal's baton over the great gray armies. Ill with influenza, he went out without his coat in winter, in search of the end. He refused the services of a physician. Cheerfully, a few days later, he

wrote with his own hand the proclamation which announced his death.

It was not centuries ago, but now — at the first rising breath of scientifically motived revolution — that the golden effigies of kings, who had once gloried in Nineveh and proud Babylon, crumbled forever into dust, and the New World swung to sight.

THE END

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The Passion Flower

By Edna Worthley Underwood

The second volume of this New World Trilogy, like its predecessor, "The Penitent," is a story of Russia. Pushkin, the poet, a superb waster flinging away fortune and reputation for a whim; Nicholas I, Czar of all the Russias, the cold and cruel incarnation of autocracy; Nesselrode, devotee of rare foods and deft juggler of men and events, — these are a few of the characters. From the gorgeous opening at a state ball, through Pushkin's wild affair with Châli, to the dramatic climax, the novel is a succession of thrilling and richly colored scenes more than bearing out the promise of "The Penitent," of which the *St. Louis Star* said, "It is doubtful if any more stupendous work has been undertaken in recent years."